Secondary Colors

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Teen And Up Audiences

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No Archive Warnings Apply

Category:
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Fandom:
僕のヒーローアカデミア | Boku no Hero Academia | My Hero Academia

Relationships:
Midoriya Izuku & Shinsou Hitoshi, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead & Midoriya Izuku, Midoriya Izuku & Yamada Hizashi | Present Mic, Hitoshi Shinsou & Kouda Kouji, Kouda Kouji & Midoriya Izuku, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead & Shinsou Hitoshi, Shinsou Hitoshi & Yamada Hizashi | Present Mic

Characters:
Midoriya Izuku, Shinsou Hitoshi, Aizawa Shouta, Inko Midoriya, Hizashi Yamada, Kayama Nemuri | Midnight, Kouda Kouji, Bakugou Katsuki, Bakugou Mitsuki, Yagi Toshinori | All Might, Todoroki Shouto, Todoroki Rei, Bakugou Masaru

Additional Tags:
Bullying, Friendship, Found Family, Dadzawa, Not-Perfect Mamadoriya, Dadmic, Shinsou calls Yamada YamaDad because of course he does, puns, An Excessive Amount of Puns, Possibly Excessive Use of JSL, japanese sign language, don't tell me Yamada doesn't use JSL, Is Fluff Without Plot a tag because I'm pretty sure this qualifies, Quirkless Midoriya Izuku, Midnight is like... the fun aunt, Materteral Midnight, I looked up the female equivalent of avuncular so y'all wouldn't have to, I have been warned to tag for Fluff, 9/10 dentists agree you should floss and brush after reading this story, the tenth is dying of cute apparently, Kouda Kouji is a spiteful Disney Princess, Rei Todoroki aka Winter Is Coming

Language:
English

Series:
Part 1 of Color Theory

Collections:
The Last Rec List, Creative Chaos Discord Recs, Best of Fanfiction, Cosmonauts Fic Recs, Favorite Fanficition from Animes, Don't Mess with Dadzawa, Read it and weep, Got 99 problems but these ain't one, its-yaboijojo Read Later/Favorites, Bnha Bookclub Discord Recs, The Collection From the Clouds, Aizawa and Izuku Mentor-Parent Fics, The Unitary, Stories That Are Cool, The Best of Aizawa, mars's bnha fanfiction library, RaeLynn's Epic Rec List, In-Progress I Want To Read, BNHA BEST CHAPTER FICS TO EVER GRACE THE INTERNET, Void's BNHA Favorites :D, Quality Fics, an aroace's favourite fics!, Fics That I Like □□☆□, BaNHAmmer, the reason i'm an insomniac, DadZawa Protecc fics, The Heliocentric Discord Server Recs, Leannic Recs, MHA_fanfics_because_idk, My Hero Academia, my heart is here, I'm manly enough to admit I cried reading these, 👁 I'm keeping an eye on you 👁, Everything so far, Bnha fanfic who has my heart, CKFTR, broccoli_shit, The Forest, Fanfics that I hoard

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by NaoNazo

Summary

"You got pushed down the stairs... and you're apologizing for it," he stated blandly. "That seems counterintuitive."
"Um... sorry?" Izuku whispered. He was starting to shake a little, adrenaline flooding his veins and leaving him cold. He had no idea what Purple was going for with his blunt statements and the hand reaching toward his shoulder as if to steady him, but apologizing was generally safe.
"You don't have to apologize, dude. I don't know your name, but I doubt it's actually Deku."
"Um. Midoriya." Izuku peered sideways at Purple as they rounded the corner. "Izuku Midoriya. Deku is just, um, just what my... friends call me." He winced.
"Sounds real friendly."

Green and Purple (Go Well Together)

Sometimes the words stick in the back of his throat. Many of his seatmates might scoff at the idea-- Mumbling Midoriya, at a loss for words? If only-- but he'd had a stutter as a kid that never really went away. His mom used to coach him to stop and take a breath to order his thoughts before he spoke. Kacchan used to whack him on the back and yell at him to "Spit it out or shut up, D-D-Deku!" One of his last vague memories of his father was his advice to practice speaking when no one was listening.

He'd looked up at the man sitting in front of his computer, quailing back a little as those eyes turned from the screen to meet his. Father sighed, then said, "You need to learn to enjoy words. Tongue-twisters, poetry, find a way to taste them and line them up. I think your brain goes a bit too fast for your mouth, so you can either slow your thoughts or work on speaking as you think."

Izuku had taken that advice to heart, which is probably where his mumbling habit had begun, come to think of it. Those stumbling early days of sitting in his room muttering about raw buckwheat and raw eggs (*namamuginamagomenamatamago*), and two chickens in the back yard (*niwanihaniwatorigairu*), until he barely noticed himself talking. When he wasn't concentrating, his thoughts burbled from his lips, a subvocal river. When he tried to talk in front of people, the river beat against his teeth but never flowed smoothly.

When he was pushed down the stairs, a startled screech was the last sound he was able to make, right before he collided with the new transfer student from class C.

"Shit, you okay?" the purple-haired pre-teen asked, groaning as he pushed himself off the floor. Izuku, sprawled awkwardly across the other boy's legs, tried to scramble backwards, bow and apologize all at once. His right arm had already begun throbbing in time with his heartbeat.

"S-s-s-" His throat clicked on a swallow, and he tried to take a calming breath. Purple-hair focused on the arm Izuku cradled to his chest.

"Dude, that looks bad. Is it broken?" Izuku looked down at his wrist, which looked mostly normal except for a rapidly reddening patch just under the heel of his palm. The pain pounded insistently, rivers of fire racing from his wrist to the socket of his shoulder, and he choked down a whimper. From the top of the stairs, Tsubasa started laughing.

"Look, Deku's gonna cry again. What a ~loser~," he jeered. Izuku flinched at the dark look on Purple's face.

With a sudden jerk, Purple pushed himself straight up, glaring at Tsubasa. "Hey asshole, why'd you push him?"

"Deku tripped on his own feet, you--"

"**Shut up and go tell a teacher what you did,**" Purple ordered. With a blank look in his eyes, Tsubasa snapped his mouth shut and pivoted sharply away. Izuku was momentarily distracted from his wrist by musings about Purple's quirk-- Could it be a physical puppeteer quirk like the underground hero Shadowboxer, or something more mental

like Suggestability or Hypnosis? It seemed like vocal responses might be the trigger (unless it was eye contact, but physical contact obviously wasn't needed), but did it have to be words or did it work with nonverbal responses like sighs or hand signs? What would happen if it was in a different language? Or something like singing, since Izuku had read that singing lyrics accessed a different part of your brain than just speaking. Either way, it sounded like an awesome--

"You know, if you talk that fast, I can't answer your questions." Purple stated, reaching out a hand to pull Izuku up by his left arm. "Anyway, let's get you to the nurse. You need some ice."

"Oh. U-um, thank you." Izuku winced as the new position jostled his arm. "Sorry for, um, for the trouble." He ducked his head as Purple shot him a sharp glance.

"You--?" He sighed. "You got pushed down the stairs... and you're apologizing for it," he stated blandly. "That seems counterintuitive."

"Um... sorry?" Izuku whispered. He was starting to shake a little, adrenaline flooding his veins and leaving him cold. He had no idea what Purple was going for with his blunt statements and the hand reaching toward his shoulder as if to steady him, but apologizing was generally a safe response.

"You don't have to apologize, dude. I don't know your name, but I doubt it's actually Deku."

"Um. Midoriya." Izuku peered sideways at Purple as they rounded the corner. "Izuku Midoriya. Deku is just, um, just what my... friends call me." He winced.

"Sounds real friendly." They'd reached the nurse's office, and Izuku's eyes widened as Purple knocked on the door, glimpsing red on the other boy's palms.

"You-- blood-- you're bleeding!" He cried. Purple looked momentarily surprised, then his face fell back into tired cynicism.

"It's what happens when you fall, Midoriya. Don't apologize for someone else's actions. Especially when you're hurt worse."

"S-still," Izuku insisted, "because of me, you- you got hurt, so..."

The nurse had finally come to answer the door.

"Midoriya, again?" She asked, something tired and contemptuous in the curl of her lip. "You're too clumsy."

Izuku almost raised his hands to wave apologetically, but an abortive jolt of his hand stopped that. "Sorry, sensei, I-- um. I fell."

Purple looked between them. "He got pushed down the stairs by some kid with wings."

The nurse turned to Izuku. "Did that really happen?"

"Uh! Um..." He glanced at Purple, pleading.

She persisted. "Last time, Bakugou told me you tripped because you weren't looking. Are you sure you were pushed?"

"Excuse me," Purple interjected. "Before you continue, he has a sprained wrist. It's your job to fix that."

The nurse rolled her eyes. "Okay, Midoriya. The ice packs are in the fridge. Please take one with you to your next class."

"... That's it. That's all you're going to do," Purple stated, disbelieving. "You haven't even looked at it. He could have a broken bone."

The nurse turned to Purple. "Which one of us has a medical certification here? Midoriya would know if his bone is broken. If he isn't crying, it's just a sprain." Izuku flinched at the reference to the last time he'd been forced to limp to the nurse's office in tears, when he'd been tripped in front of Bakugou's desk and broken two of his toes.

Anyway, the nurse's quirk, Pain Scale, did somewhat help with diagnoses, since she could look at someone and see how much pain they were in. The only drawback of the quirk was that it didn't have a gauge for people's different pain tolerance, and it tended to ignore things like fatigue caused by pain, or give more accurate readings for sharp types of pain rather than constant low-level aches. Izuku had asked about it earlier in the year when he'd needed to borrow burn cream.

"I can't believe you haven't even called his parents yet," Purple was

saying as Izuku tuned back in. He started shaking his head frantically before the nurse could answer.

"Mom's at work, I can't bother her for this," he explained. "Th-thank you, um..."

"Hitoshi Shinsou."

"Sh-Shinsou-san, but I'll be okay now, so..."

"Midoriya," Shinsou said, face entirely serious. "You need to report this. You were pushed down the stairs. That kid should be expelled. Or suspended. Something."

Izuku looked down. "They won't suspend Tsubasa for something like this. A-anyway, it was an accident, so, um." He wished he could have a quirk to sink into his floor, where his heart seemed to be. It made him a little happy that Shinsou seemed to be angry for his sake-- or at least angry that he'd been involved in Tsubasa's joke-- but Izuku had been through this too many times to expect it to change. They'd call his mom, who would start crying and asking what had happened, if anyone else had been hurt (usually not), and the teachers would suggest that Izuku might be trying to get attention, or that it had been a joke that went a bit too far, or that Izuku had tried to do something his classmates could do but unfortunately, with no quirk-- well, they hoped he'd be more careful in the future, for the sake of his health.

"I think I hit my head." Shinsou said, finally giving up on the nurse. "Let me call my guardian."

"Phone's on the desk," the nurse pointed. Izuku bobbed his head at them both, then scuttled over to the fridge in the corner, picking up a bandage on his way. It would be hard to secure the ice pack and wrap

his wrist by himself, but maybe if he only wrapped the Ace bandage a little and then slipped the ice pack in and wrapped it into place? At least he had some practice wrapping his arm by himself, so he wouldn't have to bother the nurse.

"Here, hold on, I can wrap it." Shinsou left the phone in its cradle and reached out to stop Izuku. "Let me know if it's too tight."

Izuku's eyes prickled with heat and he raised his uninjured hand to swipe across them. His mom was the only one who ever really tended to his injuries, and she always winced while doing it, like Izuku was hurting her. That was why he'd googled how to treat his own scrapes and burns, to ease that teary-eyed look of guilt from his mom's eyes (*I'm sorry, Izuku, I'm so sorry*) and keep her smiling like nothing was wrong.

Shinsou's hands weren't as gentle as his mom's, but that steady, cautious support on his elbow and the slow steady wrap of the bandage was somehow warm. Izuku chewed his lip guiltily as he noticed how Shinsou kept his hands curved to keep from bleeding on the bandage. Wrapping finished, Shinsou calmly retrieved a gel ice pack from the fridge and handed it over.

Turning back to the nurse, he stated, "I'll take that phone now." The nurse huffed out an offended sigh, retreating to the back of the office to write them late passes. With nothing to do but sit and elevate his arm, Izuku listened to Shinsou's side of the call to someone named Aizawa.

"... Yeah. But this time it's another kid. Some dipshit pushed him down the stairs onto me. I'm fine... Yeah, I did, but he deserved it... No, self-defense. Yeah... Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Okay. Thanks. Bye." Shinsou dropped the phone back onto its receiver, lips curling into a smirk.

"Now we just wait," he told Izuku.

"... Wait for...?" Izuku ventured, shifting nervously in his chair.

"For my guardian to come and rip the staff a new asshole," Shinsou replied with obvious relish. Izuku "eep"ed at the phrasing, and shut his mouth as his face grew hot with embarrassment.

"... That was adorable," Shinsou commented thoughtfully. "Like hearing a rabbit hiccup or something."

"Um." Izuku had no idea what to do with that... observation? Compliment? He winced as the ice pack dripped onto his pants, cold seeping through his skin.

"Here." Shinsou fished a handkerchief from his pocket. "To keep it from melting on your uniform."

"... thank you, Shinsou-san," Izuku mumbled. With the adrenaline from the fall seeping away and his wrist firmly splinted, he felt himself drifting into that numb space where he was just too overwhelmed for emotions to touch him, wondering vaguely whether he should tell Mom he fell again or go into more detail, like maybe he tripped on his shoelace, oh and maybe he should ask if she still had that wrist brace she used for carpal tunnel, that might be easier than trying to re-wrap every time he needed to wash his hands, but he was pretty sure they were out of ice packs again since that time he'd read something funny on his phone and Bakugou assumed he'd been laughing at him.

Shinsou kept looking at him like he wanted to say something, but in the end he just opened the nurse's first aid box and pulled out a couple band-aids.

"I'm going to wash off in the bathroom, watch my bag until I get back." Like nearly every other time he spoke, Shinsou's flat tone turned what could have been a question into a statement of fact. Izuku nodded and drew up his feet on the chair so he could huddle around his arm. The handkerchief helped, but now the A/C in the nurse's office was blowing directly down on him and he couldn't get warm. With a slight smirk, Shinsou paused to turn back, rummage in his backpack and pull out a thick scarf, which he proceeded to wrap around Izuku's neck until his nose and mouth were fully covered. "Watch the scarf, too." He left, snickering. Izuku buried his reddening face into the --thick, soft, *warmwarmwarm*-- purple scarf and gave up trying to understand the new transfer student.

When Shinsou returned, he was not alone.

"... and now you owe me another cat," Shinsou was saying, with the air of someone who has just conclusively won an argument. The dead-eyed, sparsely stubbled man who'd followed him --Presumably Aizawa the guardian?-- gazed consideringly at Izuku's hunched form and at the desk where the school nurse was winning at online solitaire.

"...Only one cat." The man responded. "And this is the kid?"

Izuku shrunk a little more into his chair. He hoped he wasn't in trouble, he really hadn't meant to fall on Shinsou, he'd just seen Mari on the step beside him and he hadn't wanted to fall on the only other student who'd lent him her notes after Noburu had decided to use his notebook as shredding practice.

The man held his hand out, palm up, expectantly. Izuku instinctively

inched backward, and tried to calculate how much money he might be asking for, then bit his lip at the split-second look of annoyance on the man's face.

"Give me your wrist, kid. I have EMT certification, I want to check it over."

Izuku blinked at him, eyes darting to Shinsou's. He gulped, pulled off the icepack and extended his arm to rest in the man's broad palm. Probably-Aizawa's fingers gently tested the wrap for any sign of looseness or over-constriction.

"How long have you had the ice pack?" Almost-definitely-Aizawa asked. Izuku opened his mouth, but he hadn't been keeping track of time. Again, he glanced at Shinsou for help.

"Around when I called you, Aizawa," the other boy volunteered. "So like, 15, 20 minutes."

It had been that long? Izuku was probably missing most of the math review already.

"Another 10 minutes, then take it off for a bit, okay kid?" Mr. Aizawa instructed. "And if the pain stays bad for the next few days, or your wrist seems out of shape, you should go to the doctor for an X-ray. Tylenol or Advil as needed, and don't try and write with that hand for a while."

Izuku nodded. He knew the drill for sprains. One of the reasons he was fairly proficient at writing with his left hand, though definitely not ambidextrous.

"Now." Aizawa pierced the nurse with his eyes. "Who do I have to speak to to report an instance of bullying and physical assault?" The nurse choked on a sup of her Calpico. An evil smirk slowly spread across Aizawa's face as she grabbed a tissue and dabbed at her face, coughing harshly.

"Ph-physical assault?" Izuku asked. His mind was blank with horror and guilt. "I-- I'm so sorry! Really!"

Shinsou and Aizawa turned to him, eyebrows raised.

"I-I really didn't mean to, honest! I just d-didn't, didn't see you when I tried not to hit Mari, an- an- and..."

"He's reporting the boy who pushed you, Midoriya," Shinsou interrupted. "Obviously."

"O-oh," well, that was a relief. For about three seconds. "But, um, but Tsubasa didn't really mean to, I-I mean, he wasn't really--" the words dried up on Izuku's tongue as Aizawa leveled him with a look a few shades softer than a glare.

"Ice off now, problem child." Back to the nurse, he said, "Either contact the teachers for Midoriya and this Tsubasa kid, or contact the principal and let him know I want to talk." Without looking at him, Aizawa reached out a hand and rested it gently on his shoulder, squeezing briefly before letting go.

Maybe Shinsou took lessons on being confusing from Aizawa?

Ten minutes later, Aizawa, Shinsou, Izuku, and his homeroom teacher

were all in the principal's office. Izuku had expected the same script they always gave his mom, but apparently the double power of Aizawa and Shinsou's looks of deadpan disbelief unnerved the principal enough that he was now blustering randomly about the school's excellent record with graduating students and how sometimes thin-skinned kids needed to be toughened up a little before they went out into the world.

"I'm betting if we opened Midoriya's records, we'd see a lot more toughening up than the other students," Aizawa observed. Izuku privately doubted that they'd recorded most of his injuries, especially the ones that were obviously caused by particular recognizable quirks. It wasn't like that many students could leave blast marks wherever they punched.

"You don't agree?" Shinsou asked him in an undertone.

"They, um, they only write down when they have to dispense medicine," he murmured. "Bandages and o-ointment aren't notated." Not to mention, he only had to go there when his own supplies ran out.

"Putting that aside, you have a witness who saw another student attack with intent to harm. You also should have the confession the instigating student gave to his teacher."

"Under the influence of a control quirk," the principal objected. "How do we know he wasn't brainwashed into pushing Midoriya?"

"B-because that's not--!" "So you admit he--"

Izuku and Shinsou turned to look at each other when they both spoke at once. Shinsou lifted an eyebrow at Izuku, which he took as

permission to speak.

"Sh-shinsou-san's quirk doesn't work like that. It requires a r-, a response before he can take control, and he only used it after we both fell, so, he, um, so you can't--" Izuku lost steam when the principal curled his lip at him. Aizawa came to the rescue.

"Your blatant attempt at blaming my ward aside, I'm sure if we asked around we could find other witnesses who saw both the initial attack and the fact that my ward only used his quirk in self-defense. I could take this to the police, who take accusations of quirk discrimination very seriously," here Aizawa paused. "But I honestly don't think that would do much to change your mind, or more importantly, your actions. So instead, I'm going to ask how you're going to punish the instigator, and how you're going to protect Midoriya and my ward from any attempted reprisals."

After several more minutes of dithering, it was decided that Tsubasa would be suspended for three days, and given a week of detention. Also, apparently Izuku would never be made to be in a group with him or sit next to him for the rest of the year. Izuku wished they could do the same for the rest of Bakugou's group, but he was at least thankful to be separated from Tsubasa as much as possible. Well, until his teacher decided to ignore it, most likely. Mr. Nakamura tended to seat him next to students he thought were "disruptive," as if Izuku could possibly do anything to rein them in.

As they left (Izuku had missed all of his Math class, but the homework would still be written on the board until they finished Literature class), Aizawa did the shoulder-pat-squeeze of comfort to Shinsou and Izuku in turn, and handed the latter a card with his number.

"Call this if you get injured again, or if another student tries

something," he instructed. Then, to Shinsou, "Make sure he does."

"'Course. See you tonight," Shinsou answered, while Izuku tried to figure out whether a stranger had really just instructed his son (ward? their last names were different) to watch over a random kid they'd just met.

Aizawa nodded and left without a second glance. Izuku buried his nose into his borrowed scarf, hoping against hope that with all the talking done, he would be free to slink away to his next class.

"I don't have your number." Shinsou remarked.

"O-oh. Um. No?" Izuku responded.

"You should give it to me."

"Y-you really, um, really don't have to actually, you know, check up on me?" Izuku tried. It wasn't that he didn't want to give Shinsou his number, it was mainly that the last time a classmate had asked for his number, it was so they could share it with the members of class who thought it was funny to tell him to kill himself and "remove his dud genes from the pool." Plus, his screen was still cracked enough that it was hard to read the end of any messages longer than a line.

"Check up on you? Midoriya, I'm offended. I thought you knew I'd fallen for you."

Izuku choked for a second, flush spreading across his face. Then the pun registered.

"... Really?"

"Have a nice trip. See you next fall," Shinsou continued, smirk starting to grow into a grin.

"Shinsou."

"Did you sprain your wrist when you fell from Heaven?"

"D-Did it hurt when you broke thr- through the Earth's crust to crawl out of hell?" Izuku shot back, starting to smile back. Shinsou let out a bark of surprised laughter, which devolved into breathless giggles as he covered his smile.

"You have sass, Midoriya. Obviously we need to be friends." Shinsou held out his hand, "Phone."

Izuku sighed, but fished his phone out from his bag and turned it on. Shinsou navigated the menu and added his number in silence.

"I texted myself already, so I have your number. Feel free to let me know when the douches try again, or like, if you meet a nice cat or something."

"You, um, you like cats?" Izuku asked, accepting his phone back.

"We have six little idiots and I love them," Shinsou affirmed. "I can send you pictures."

Izuku smiled, genuinely warmed at the thought of someone wanting to send him nice messages just because. "I'd like that."

Maybe later Bakugou would try to explode his phone because he was smiling at it too often. Maybe he would have to hide the scarf in the depths of his backpack with the handkerchief in order to keep them un-exploded so he could wash and return them. Maybe halfway through literature class his wrist would start throbbing hard enough to bring tears to his eyes and he would realize he'd forgotten to get another icepack from the nurse. Still, in all, this had ended up being one of the better days Izuku had spent since kindergarten.

The Friendening

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sometimes Izuku was ready to swear that Shinsou was just as terrible at the social aspect of school life as he was. From watching his classmates, Izuku had assumed that most friendships were based on proximity, similar interests, and popularity. There was a clear hierarchy, Bakugou had stood at the top of it since they were four, and Izuku was at the very bottom. If this was the food chain, Bakugou would be a lion, and Izuku would be the grass he stepped on while he chased gazelles. If Bakugou were a shark, Izuku was plankton.

Maybe he shouldn't have watched so many nature documentaries. Anyway. Shinsou didn't do the friendship thing like most other people did. He didn't send texts asking Izuku to hang out at the arcade or go to karaoke. He didn't set up study meetings or join any school clubs (not that Izuku could fault him, being a card-carrying member of the Going Home Club himself). What Shinsou did instead, was appear, seemingly at random, whenever one of Izuku's bullies found him outside of class.

"Yo, Tsubasa, how's detention going?" He called out when the winged boy had Izuku backed against his locker, pudgy fingers tight at his collar.

"Oi, Baka-gou, the teacher's looking for you. Says to keep the goddamn noise down and find a life," he drawled when he found Bakugou looming over Izuku's shoulder in the cafeteria with sparking hands.

"Science says you should see a doctor about getting your head removed from your ass," he growled when one of the seniors had dragged Izuku into a group and commented loudly on an article he'd read about the evolutionary duds that were just waiting to die out, wasn't that funny, maybe they should stick Deku into a museum as the

last of his kind, or donate his body to science.

After two weeks of this (and the return of Shinsou's scarf, handkerchief, and some mochi he'd bought from the store as a thank you), Izuku finally put his foot down.

"Shinsou! Do, do you want to, um, go somewhere after class?" His voice pitched higher than usual in nervousness. Izuku clenched his fists by his sides, bracing himself.

Shinsou blinked. "Sure."

At that point they both kind of stared at each other and waited. A bit more. And a bit longer.

"...So I'll meet you at the school gate?" Shinsou asked, quieter than normal. Izuku nodded. And looked down at his hands. And back at Shinsou.

"I, um. I'll see you then!" He smiled, partly with relief that the conversation (short as it was) had gone well, and partly excitement that he'd be hanging! out! with another human! Someone his age, even, who didn't seem to hate him!

Shinsou smirked back, hands in his pockets. "Keep both feet on the ground till then, Midoriya. Can't have you falling for anyone else before we go."

Izuku gave that the laugh/groan the joke deserved and beat feet back to his classroom before he could try and pun back. He couldn't wait for after school!

Izuku had made a terrible mistake. And the mistake wasn't inviting Shinsou, or trying to talk to his sort-of-friend-sort-of-anti-bully-squad. The problem was assuming Shinsou would like to do what he preferred to do after school, which was mainly head home and watch the news while doing homework.

Izuku was such a boring person! He had no talents or hobbies, no quirk, no reason at all Shinsou should want to be friends with him!

Also, he was really regretting letting Shinsou into his room at all, since the other boy hadn't stopped snickering about his posters and All Might patterned sheets for the past five minutes. Particularly at the posters of doujinshi illustrations of underground heroes, come to think of it.

(And no, not EXPLICIT posters, he'd never have something like that on his walls. It's just, when you're a fan of an underground hero, who by default has no merchandise or official fan club events, you kind of have to create your own content or pay someone to make it for you.

Izuku is not at all ashamed of supporting the underground hero fandom, especially since he's noticed that a lot of those heroes tend to be extremely skilled with using their subtle quirks and occasionally quirkless martial arts. He just wished Shinsou hadn't found that one commissioned work of Eraserhead glaring down at a scarf-wrapped, de-flamed Endeavor.

Izuku had bought that one after reading a post on Pro or No (the top hero debate site) comparing heroes by thousands of yen of property damage per fight and how much of the repairs they personally

reimbursed. Endeavor was highest for causing collateral damage, including occasionally injuring innocent bystanders, and his lawyers were specifically criticized for trying to weasel out of repair costs. In comparison, Eraserhead was nearly always precise enough to avoid property damage, used weapons specifically designed to immobilize without injuring his opponents, and was generally loved by anyone who had been saved by him.)

Izuku's favorite was All Might, because of course it was, but he'd sort of dreamed about how awesome it would be to meet a hero who didn't rely on just his quirk and fought with his mind and strength.

Shinsou raised his phone to take a picture, framing so that Izuku's red face was in the frame.

"Aizawa's gonna love it," he commented, grinning that wide evil smile he seemed to have inherited from his guardian.

"Shinsouuuuuuuuuuu," Izuku whined. "Y-you can't-- I mean, I don't-- I mean--"

"He replied with a cat pic." Shinsou sat next to Izuku on the bed and turned the phone around to show him an image of a cat covering his eyes with one paw, head down in shame. "I'm pretty sure that means he loves it."

"S-so Aizawa-san is a fan of Eraserhead?" Izuku hazarded.

"Eh, not really." Shinsou shrugged. "I am, though."

"H-he's so cool!" Izuku burst out, hands waving enthusiastically. "H-he

uses a capture weapon in addition to his quirk, probably because his Erasure quirk only works on Emitter type quirks and doesn't stop physical or secondary mutations. A-and I heard he's famous for intervening for kids and making them feel safe. At le- At least, that's what I've heard from the forums! There are a lot of people who are super grateful to him, e-even though he's never really talked to the media or tried to sell himself as a hero. I always thought- Um." Izuku swallowed. He'd been about to say, 'I always thought maybe I could try to be a hero like him.' Better not to go there.

"You know a lot about heroes." Shinsou observed. "Did you find that analysis online?"

"O-oh. Um." Face burning, he gestured at the shelf of notebooks above his desk. "No, I wr- wrote that from watching the news. And from hearing people's stories. It's, um, nothing special."

"You figured out his quirk's limitations even though you've never actually seen him in action. I'm guessing you've done that for all the heroes on your wall, too."

Izuku shook his head. "No, um, I mean. I write about other people in our class, too. It's good practice, because I can see how it works more easily."

Shinsou pursed his lips. "Am I in one of those?"

Izuku twisted his hands in his lap. "I- I only wrote a little. Nothing bad! Um, I can... show you?" This was the point where people usually called him creepy, pathetic, or freakish, the part when they saw how he'd dissected their quirks for strengths and weaknesses.

Shinsou held out a hand, expression neutral. Izuku scrambled up and

fetched his latest notebook from his desk, flipping to one of the more recent pages, and tentatively placing it in Shinsou's hands. He sat back down, gingerly, while Shinsou started to read. In the silence, he almost thought he could hear his heart beating fast and frantic in his throat.

"Huh."

"Yes?" Izuku straightened up, met Shinsou's eyes and immediately looked back down at his hands.

"Do you mean it?" Shinsou lay the notebook on the spread between them, tapping one line at the end of the page. Izuku leaned over to read it. *'Shinsou's quirk seems perfect for underground heroics, especially hostage situations and any sort of undercover work (especially if quirk can be used to erase memories or make people confess truthfully). Might be smart to disguise quirk's "trigger" to keep as ace in sleeve-- pretend it requires physical touch or eye contact if quirk is voice-based, etc.'*

Izuku nodded. "Um, y-yeah. It would definitely be smart to keep the, um, trigger sequence a secret if you were an un-underground hero."

"You think I can be a hero?" Shinsou was staring straight into Izuku's eyes, as if daring him to say he'd been joking about it all.

"Y-you, um. Every time you used your quirk, it's been to save me. So. You're on your-- on your way to being a hero already, Shinsou-san." Izuku held Shinsou's eyes for as long as he could, hoping to impress exactly how serious he was. They were both quiet for a moment, caught in an unspoken tension. Finally, Shinsou bit his lip and looked down, nodding.

"Okay."

"O-okay?"

"I've decided, Midoriya." Shinsou's lips curled up, a crooked smile just a little smaller than his typical, well, what Bakugou would call a "shit-eating grin."

"Decided? Um..." Izuku looked back at the book, then up at Shinsou. "What do you mean?"

"If I... *When* I become a hero," Shinsou continued, "you are only allowed ONE picture of me on your wall."

"Wh-wh-" Izuku stuttered, blushing furiously. "But, um, if you get higher in rankings, then, um, group- group photos! I can't get just one, so, um--"

"You're only allowed group photos if you're in them too," Shinsou pronounced. Izuku's jaw dropped.

"Midoriya, you want to be a hero too, right?" Shinsou pinned Izuku with his eyes, implacable like Aizawa's dead-eyed stare. "So if you want photos, you'll have to be there too."

"Shinsou, but, don't you--" Izuku thought he'd heard by now. "I- I'm--" *useless. pathetic. worthless.* "--quirkless."

"So?"

"So I-- I can't--" Izuku's voice broke. "No matter how hard I try, I can't do anything special, so--"

Face flat, Shinsou picked up the notebook, leafing through it. As if he'd found what he wanted, he paused on one page, nodded to himself, and closed the notebook.

Then he lifted it with one hand and used it to smack Izuku on the top of the head. "You can't say you're not special, not after showing me this. If you can look at quirks and see their weaknesses that clearly, you can definitely use that to save people. After all, you were the one who stood up for me to the principal and told him how my quirk worked after seeing it once. You think every hero can do that?"

Izuku found, to his horror, that his eyes were filling with tears. It was just, too nice, too warm, too much praise. Too much.

"Ah shit, I didn't mean to make you cry." Shinsou frowned, rummaging in his pocket for a handkerchief. "Please don't, it feels like I kicked a puppy."

Izuku's lips trembled harder as Shinsou put the handkerchief in his hands. A tear slipped down his cheek, soon joined by another and another. Trying to calm down, he held his breath, but all that did was pause the flood for a second. With a tearing sob, he had to breathe again, and his world became a blur of heat on his cheeks, warm soft cotton in his hands, and a ball of terrified hope caught in his throat.

"Fucking..." Shinsou dragged a hand over his face. "Would a hug... help? I mean if contact is okay. I'm so fucking bad at this. Just, uh. Nod once for hug, shake your head for no hug. Okay?"

Izuku nodded, eyes clamped shut.

"Wait does that mean okay you understand or okay you want a hug? Shit, wait." Shinsou was dithering, which Izuku might have found funny in any other situation. Instead, he just inched forward slightly, slowly enough Shinsou could back away if he, well, if he didn't want to--

"Fuck it, hug it is," Shinsou declared, curling one arm around Izuku's shuddering shoulders. "Just, um. Let it all out, yeah?" He looked down at the poof of green hair that was all he could see of his friend's downturned face. "Don't worry about it, Midoriya." With a sigh, he pulled his arms closed, so that Izuku was prompted to curl up against his left shoulder, where Shinsou predicted his shirt might never dry. "Does talking help? Hearing me talk, I mean? Sometimes when I get bad it helps to hear about something else, anything really. Um. Nod your head once for 'keep talking,' shake your head for 'shut up?'"

Izuku nodded, small and tentative against his friend's shoulder.

"Okay. Um. Fuck. Well. I have cat stories? That's literally all I can talk about, like ever. Well, memes and cat stories. Cat memes mostly. But they aren't funny if you just describe them. Anyway, our youngest idiot cat is about 10 months old, she's half-ragdoll kitty, half-something else cuz a breeder lost one of his cats and found her again pregnant and didn't want the mixes. She has really pretty blue eyes and absolutely no brain. Anyway, she's decided that any time someone uses the fridge it means they're getting her food, so she'll just come RUNNING whenever she hears you walk towards it, but she's not all that good at stopping on our tile floors, so she's run straight into the kitchen counter about three times," Shinsou paused, chuckling.

"We're getting a little worried she has amnesia because she keeps doing it. So Aizawa got tired of it and tried putting up like, a baby gate? To keep the cats out of the kitchen. It worked great for like a day, but then Aizawa's partner was trying to make coffee one morning and just tripped spectacularly and nearly broke his nose. So long story short we took down the gate and now there are pillows taped to the

sides of our counters to idiot-proof the kitchen for our cats."

Izuku let out a watery chuckle, then sniffled. He was finally calming down, which was good, but brought with it the embarrassment of breaking down in front of a new friend because he said a nice thing.

"You know, my guardian told me crying is a natural way to relieve emotion, and it just gets worse if you try and hold it back. Like trying to hold back a sneeze for too long."

Izuku stilled for a moment, then pulled back to look up at Shinsou. The other boy cocked an eyebrow at him and drawled, "Crying is just sneezing from your eyes, Midoriya."

He couldn't hold back a snort of laughter at that, covering his face with his hands and Shinsou's crumpled handkerchief as relief buoyed him up and hilarity stole his breath.

"Sh-Shinsou," he choked out between chuckles. "You can't SAY THAT."

"Pretty sure I just did." Shinsou looked extremely pleased with himself. "Laughter is kind of like sneezing too, I guess."

"STOP IT," Izuku pushed at Shinsou's shoulder gently, admonishing. "I can't... breathe..."

"I'm really not that funny, which means you're probably just punchy right now. Or maybe you're just..." the pause dragged on ominously, "...falling over laughing?"

At that, Izuku managed to straighten up and glare (kind of, his eyes were a bit swollen and tired from crying). "Y-you're going to run o-out of "falling" puns eventually."

"And on that day, I may fall down dead," Shinsou declared, faux-dramatic. Izuku huffed a sigh, and did what had to be done.

He pushed Shinsou off the bed.

The other boy landed with a loud "oof" and lay there as if stunned for a moment-- it definitely hadn't hurt, Izuku's bed was barely a foot off the ground.

"...Midoriya," Shinsou drawled, an evil glint in his eye, "if you want me to fall for you, you only have to ask."

"G-give me your phone, I want to tell Aizawa-san his son is abou- is about to be murdered," Izuku shot back. "And that he HAD IT COMING."

"Nah, you'd never kill me," Shinsou answered breezily. "Because you don't have anyone to... take the fall."

Izuku grabbed his pillow and threw it at Shinsou's face.

"Aw, thanks, Midoriya, now I can... fall asleep." Shinsou grabbed the pillow tightly when Izuku tried to take it back, leading Izuku to rally with a stuffed All-Might figure and face Shinsou in pillow battle. No clear winner was declared by the time they started panting and flopped down on the ground, but at least Shinsou was too out of breath to make any more puns.

Shinsou left to eat dinner with his guardians before Izuku's mother came home, and Izuku had straightened his room back into order by the time her key turned in the lock. She didn't comment on his red eyes or rumpled shirt when she served dinner, and Izuku scrupulously avoided looking at the way she twisted her wedding ring and glanced at the phone.

(It had been two months since his father called, although the check had arrived in their account like usual. At this point, Izuku could barely remember the last time he'd seen his father's face outside of his mother's photo albums. All he knew was that his father left when he was four, then the doctor visit had happened and his dad just... never came back. After ten years of distance, he probably couldn't call Hisashi Midoriya a "dad" at all, but he was still Mom's husband.) Izuku straightened his shirt, thanked Mom for the meal and washed the dishes, sleeves rolled up slightly past his wrists (but never further up, bad idea to get into a habit like that with a classmate like Bakugou).

"I made a friend, Mom," he said softly.

"You did? Oh, Izuku, I'm so happy! Do they," she paused, smile falling, "they don't know, do they?"

Izuku shut his eyes tight, then opened them, looking back down at the dishes. "N-no, he knows."

"O-oh." Mom appeared lost for words. Izuku finished washing the last dish and dried them all carefully, hands steady as his heart wasn't.

As he stood at the sink, she walked up behind him, laying a gentle hand on his shoulder.

"I'm glad, Izuku," she whispered, voice wavering. Biting his lip, Izuku nodded, thanked her, and headed back to his room to finish his homework.

It took half an hour before that soft *'they don't know, do they?'* would leave his head.

Chapter End Notes

Ok, just to pre-empt anyone who reads this chapter and asks whether Izuku and Shinsou will end up together, my answer is a solid "maybe?"
I personally headcanon Izuku as demi/greyromantic, so it's very possible he will end up crushing on Shinsou as they grow closer. At this point, though, they're like 14 and mainly at the "wow hugs with friends are really comforting, weird how that works" stage.
Next chapter, the return of Aizawa!

EDIT: I have been reliably informed that children 13 and up are in relationships. (Thanks stranger things season 3 for prompting that conversation). This may be the fact that I am extremely ace but somehow I blocked all memories from junior high that involved ppl dating because it was so weird to me. (Don't you have to be twenty or older to date? Can't we put it off until then? What the heck does a crush feel like anyway? Questions included in your "am I ace, aro or just a really late bloomer" starter kit.)
Still deciding about ships for this story, but they won't be romantic until the kiddos are like... fifteen or sixteen. JSYK.

Meet the Parent(s)

Chapter Notes

tw for brief suicide mention

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In the next three weeks, Izuku and Shinsou fell into a routine. They'd meet in the mornings before class and talk about the latest public hero fights and cats they'd seen (under duress, Izuku had started to subscribe to a few cat-sighting Insta accounts purely to have something to talk about), and then separate to their own classes. After school, they'd either head to the nearest 7/11 for tea and donuts (Shinsou ordered iced coffee "as black as his soul," which turned out to be a light milky brown saturated with sugar), or hang out at Izuku's home, which was a short walk from the school. Izuku tended to direct them to the convenience store as often as he could. The food was starting to make a dent on his wallet, but at least that way they had less chance of confronting Bakugou and his gang.

When Izuku was finally able to remove his wrist brace, he and Shinsou celebrated with a visit to the Starbucks at the train station. Izuku curled around his hot chocolate as he saved a seat for Shinsou in the booth by the window. At the counter, Shinsou was ordering the last of the cronuts ("My treat, Midoriya, put your wallet away.") and a hojicha latte. Izuku pondered if he should start brushing his teeth more frequently, since he always seemed to eat a lot of sugar when he hung out with Shinsou. It would suck to get a cavity.

"So." Shinsou set their food down, sliding a cronut over to Izuku. "I want you to meet my pa--guardians. When are you free for dinner?"

Izuku choked on a sip of his cocoa. Coughing he reached for a napkin to wipe his face. "A- Are you sure? I mean, you're welcome to um, meet my mom, she's asked after you a lot but normally she comes home later than your train so maybe a weekend would be better but--"

"Midoriya. Breathe." Shinsou propped his cheek on his hand and took a bite of his treat. "I'd be happy to meet your mom any weekend. But my guardians tend to work weekend nights, so a weekday is best for us. Aizawa has been asking after you, anyway."

Izuku nearly responded, "Sounds fake but okay." An adult? Interested in his welfare? Historically, not probable. Instead, he fished out his phone.

"I-If you're sure, um, I can just tell my mom I won't be home for dinner?" He offered. Shinsou grinned.

"Awesome! Finish your food, I want to introduce you to the cats."

Under the pressure of Shinsou's expectant gaze, Izuku finished his food in less than two minutes and pitched his empty cup of cocoa into the trash-can. Following his friend to the ticket machines, he reflected that the "treat at Starbucks" trip had been part of Shinsou's dastardly plan from the start. Did it count as manipulative to bribe someone to meet your parents if the bribe was a cronut? Or was it just cunning?

The train was less crowded than Izuku had expected, but he and Shinsou still ended up standing after Izuku gave up his seat to an elderly lady with a cane (she pinched his cheeks when she thanked him, which made Shinsou nearly cry with laughter).

Riding with another person, Izuku couldn’t justify just checking the hero news sites on his phone like normal, and Shinsou apparently normally listened to music when he traveled. They ended up sharing headphones to listen to one of Shinsou’s playlists.

Izuku smiled through the first couple songs, but by the third he had a growing suspicion. When he finally asked to see the song titles,

Shinsou bit his lip to keep from laughing.

"'Fallin for U,' 'Catch Me I'm Falling, 'Fallen Angel' and 'Sugar We're Goin Down' by… Fall Out Boy." Izuku leveled a look at Shinsou. "I h-had no expectations, but somehow I'm still disa- disappointed."

Shinsou cracked up, nearly slipping as his hand fell from the strap. Izuku grabbed his arm to steady him as more passengers flooded in, rolling his eyes. "I'm p-pretty sure your tombstone will say something like 'Good friend, good son, too bad about all the puns.'"

"Planning my epitaph already, Midoriya? You'll have to get in line. Aizawa swears he's going to have it say 'Dead of Stupid.'"

Izuku laughed, but his thoughts took a slightly darker turn.

Before Shinsou, he would have sworn that his mom would be the only one to notice if he died or disappeared. It was a somewhat accepted fact that Quirkless people were three times more likely than their peers to commit suicide (from a study he'd looked up in America), and at a higher risk for things like abusive relationships, mental health problems, substance abuse and hate crimes.

He'd never met another quirkless person his age, but he could list off twelve who had died at high school age in Japan in the last fifteen years. The day after a suicide in Tokyo had made the news, his classmates had left flowers on his desk as if to say, "What are you waiting for?"

Shinsou poked him in the side. "Come on, it's our stop." He seemed to have picked up Izuku's change of mood, because he only spoke to give directions as they walked to his apartment.

“Okay, it’s before 8, so Yamada should be home but Aizawa will still be working,” Shinsou informed him once they reached the building. “Yamada’s cool, though, you’ll like him.” He pulled Izuku into the elevator, pressed the button for the tenth floor, and bounced on his heels. “I can’t wait for you to meet all our cats, they’re such beautiful fuzzy idiots.”

Shinsou unlocked the door, calling out, “We’re home!” He bent down to pull off his shoes as two cats came up to sniff at his ankles and meow imperiously. Behind him, Izuku peered at the entrance way, taking in the abundance of slippers for visitors, the pictures of Shinsou, Aizawa and a blond man making funny faces together at an amusement park, and a tiny cactus in a pot by the door.

“Welcome home!” The tall blond man from the photos came bounding out of a side room, face lit up with a wide smile. “Hitoshiiiiiiiiiii, introduce your friend!”

Shinsou grinned at Izuku, who had sat down to take off his shoes and was now besieged by curious cats. “Yama-dad, meet Izuku Midoriya. Midoriya, this is Yamada, Aizawa’s partner.”

Izuku tried to get up but gave up when one of the cats settled in his lap. “I- I- It’s nice to meet you, Yama--” He sniffed. “Ya- ah-- *kchew!* ”

Yamada’s eyes widened. “Hitoshi,” he said urgently.

“I’m sor-- ah-- *kchew!* ” Izuku sneezed again, fishing a handkerchief from his pocket to cover his nose and mouth. “I think I’m a-- all-- *kchew!* ”

Shinsou looked like his birthday had come early. “Midoriya,” he said, voice trembling. “You sneeze like a kitten.”

Izuku narrowed slightly watery eyes at him. “I’m s- sorry, Yamada-san,” he managed to get out. Yamada’s expression mirrored Shinsou’s look of ecstatic surprise.

“I kind of want to offer you allergy pills but I also kind of want to record this and put it online,” Shinsou said reflectively. Yamada laughed, loud and booming and oddly familiar, and finally moved over to scoop up the cat and let Izuku up.

“Come on, Midoriya, let’s get you some tea and Benadryl. I’m allergic to cats too, so we have a lot in the house,” Yamada explained, leading the way to the kitchen. Izuku was starting to get the feeling that he’d heard Yamada’s voice before, but he wasn’t quite sure from where.

“Y-you’re allergic t-to cats?” Izuku asked, nearly tripping as two other black and brown furballs came racing for his feet.

“Yeah, but Hitoshi and Shouta both love ‘em, so I gave in.”

“He gets first dibs on TV remote and radio in exchange,” Shinsou interjected, arms full of a very fat tabby cat that seemed determined to stick a paw in his mouth. “And he --pbtht, stop it young man-- he makes us watch rom coms and Disney *all the time*.”

Yamada laughed again, pulling a box of allergy medication from a cabinet and placing it in front of Izuku's seat, gesturing for him to sit.

“You can never have too much Disney, Hitoshi! One day, it’ll be *~part*

of your world~ ," Yamada crooned, hands fluttering slightly as he sang the last phrase.

"Y-you're Present Mic!" Izuku exclaimed, voice unintentionally loud. Yamada nearly dropped the kettle he was trying to fill, while Shinsou gave a triumphant shout.

"Yes! I told you he'd figure it out! You owe me a Lord of the Rings marathon, Yama-dad!"

Izuku looked between the two, jaw nearly on the floor. "Y-you-- you-- I -- what?"

Yamada set the kettle to boil and turned back to face them, grinning full force. "Nice one, Midoriya! What gave me away?"

"U-um." His mind was a jumbled mess of confusion, excitement, hero worship and shock. "Present Mic is mike-ing me tea. I mean making. I mean. Um."

"Yama-dad, you broke him." Shinsou sat next to Izuku, handing him the tabby. "Pet Young Man for a bit, then try again." Izuku nodded, automatically stroking the heavy cat on his lap. Twenty pounds of warm soft weight began to purr like a freight engine.

"Y-young man?" He asked, after a moment.

"Yeah. You know, like "Young Man, there's no need to feel down, I said, young man, pick yourself off the ground,'" Shinsou elaborated, deadpan. "He's named after the YMCA song, cuz he always reaches up with both paws like he's dancing."

“O-oh,” Izuku nodded.

“Those two,” Shinsou pointed at the brown and black cats that had followed them to the kitchen, “are siblings, Stella and Sombra. There’s an orange one that hates strangers hidden in my room probably, his name is Leon, short for Chameleon. The white one that sat on you earlier is our idiot Siamese baby, she’s named Luna. And our oldest kitty is probably asleep in Aizawa’s sleeping bag, her name is Support.”

Izuku tried to commit that information to memory. “So… Young Man, Stella, Sombra, Leon, Luna and Support?”

“Yep.” Yamada poured them both tea from the kettle. “Good going, kid. But seriously, I’m curious-- how could you tell?”

Marshalling his thoughts, Izuku took a gulp of tea and swallowed quickly as it burnt his tongue. “Um. W-well, first it was your laugh, I um, I listen to your radio show? And your v-voice is normally lower than when you’re presenting someone so it doesn’t sound the same, but your laugh doesn’t change. Plus, um, you do s-sign language videos twice a month? A-and I saw the one where you did sign language versions of diff-- of different Disney songs, so. You almost did it just now.”

Yamada nodded, somewhat impressed.

“Also, when you’re in hero uniform you wear sunglasses and your hair is up, but it doesn’t cover that much of your face and your clothes right now are kind of similar to your uniform when you first debuted. If you were trying to conceal your civilian identity, it might be better to have a voice amplifier that always covers your mouth and just turn

it on and off when you need it. You could even add in an air filter to keep out smoke and gases, or add in a voice changer if you wanted more anonymity." Izuku took a breath, and let his shaking hands drop to Young Man.

"Told you he's a genius," Shinsou said proudly.

"I-- I'm not--" Izuku gave up on words for the moment and settled for smacking Shinsou's arm reproachfully. He took the moment to gulp down the Benadryl, feeling another sneeze coming on.

"Well, in any case, it's nice to meet you, Midoriya." Yamada grinned, echoing his words with his hands, *nice to meet you.* "It's nice that you're interested in sign language, it comes in very handy for heroes to be able to communicate with no one listening in."

"O-oh," Izuku replied, hands automatically returning the greeting, *nice to meet you.* "I'm not very good, I can only, um." Taking a risk, he switched to sign language. *I'm learning, not good at sign but I can f-i-n-g-e-r-s-p-e-l-l.* "I like it but, um, but it's hard to practice." Alone, he meant. He was kind of sort of studying German and Spanish in his own time, but it was hard to practice any language on his own.

Shinsou grinned at them both. *I'm learning, too, we can practice t-o-g-e-t-h-e-r.* Yamada shook his head. *Together* , he signed. *Means t-o-g-e-t-h-e-r.*

"At any rate, Shouta will be pleased. He likes signing more than talking most days," Yamada confided.

"A-Aizawa-san can sign too?" Izuku wasn't sure if what he was feeling was hope or envy. It seemed like Yamada and Aizawa were both really busy (Yamada was a hero! Shinsou lived with a pro hero, how cool

was that!) but they still made time to teach Shinsou new things and watch Disney together and have all these happy cats even though Yamada was allergic. He wished his apartment allowed pets, it would have been nice to come home to someone that would always be happy to see him.

“Aizawa will be home in a bit, right? Midoriya and I can do our homework until then,” Shinsou volunteered. “I know you have to get back to grading.”

Yamada groaned, slumping forward in his chair. “Can we switch? I’ll do your English if you you grade mine.”

“I’d say yes, but last time we tried, I gave all of your students stickers that said ‘Me-wow’ and failed three of them for not talking about cats enough,” Shinsou replied.

“You were like, seven, I was just impressed you didn’t grade them in crayon,” Yamada shot back.

“I was twelve.”

“Same difference, squirt.” Yamada grinned at them both. “Table’s all yours, let me know if you want the radio on or off.” He dusted off his hands, rescued the black cat that was curiously sniffing at the kettle on the counter, and left the room.

“Shinsou,” Izuku murmured, cradling Young Man. “Pinch me I think I’m-- ow!”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry about the abrupt ending, I figured that Aizawa kind of

needs a long chapter to himself, so this one is all YamaDad. I've been planning Shinsou's Falling playlist since chapter one, so I'm proud it finally made it in. Link to the playlist here.

May or may not go back and make this chapter longer as I write the next one, but enjoy this scene for now!

Of all the cat names I cannot take full credit for Young Man (also possibly written Jung Man for the puns, but Shinsou didn't want to go that far in depth), as that was an actual cat name for an extremely muscular cat my friend and I came up with. JSYK.

Also, Yamada for sure would know sign language as a hero who attacks using his vocal cords (plus I'm headcanoning his parents as Deaf/Hard of Hearing), and I'm betting Izuku would think it's awesome but not have very much time to practice by himself. JSL is hella interesting and they do have a news channel specifically for news in sign language, which is where I got the idea for Yamada's bimonthly sign language special.

Anyway, hope you liked the chapter, I'll try to update again soon!

Plant Kid and Sleepy Kid

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Doing homework at Shinsou's house was different. A cat snoring softly on his lap, hot tea at his elbow, and the score from some action movie playing in the background. Shinsou's pen tapping against the table as he looked over his English reading, occasionally shouting questions to Yamada in the other room. Even the blanket Shinsou had decided to drape over his shoulders when he came back from changing out of his uniform, some kind of novelty fuzzy blanket that ended in a hood with cat ears. Izuku was pretty sure Shinsou only did that so he could take pictures of the hood trying to fight the natural poof of Izuku's hair, but it was so warm and soft, he just shrugged and tucked it closer around himself.

Around 6, the background music changed to something that Izuku vaguely recognized as Phantom of the Opera, and Shinsou offered him earplugs because it was Yamada's "music hour." Izuku nearly vibrated out of his seat as he scribbled amendments to his Present Mic page--obviously, Mic's vocal quirk did not just increase his natural volume, but it was more effective at different pitches, so it made sense that the hero would need to keep his voice in good shape in order to use his quirk to peak effectiveness.

Was Present Mic's quirk a Mutation that increased the range and durability of his vocal cords? Or was it a Mutant Emitter quirk that allowed him to control the waves of sounds that he emitted from his mouth? Could he change the direction and focus at will? Izuku wasn't sure if Present Mic was able to break glass by emitting sound waves at a certain pitch, it seemed like something he probably didn't practice at home. But if his vocal blasts were powerful enough to send villains flying backwards and damage structures behind them, was it possible he'd be able to use it as a propulsion system if he could focus the sound waves directly at the ground? Izuku was pretty sure he'd read a comic at some point with a character who could fly by using vocal blasts to repel himself from the ground, and maybe that might not be feasible within city limits, but it would be good to be able to slow a

fall from a tall height maybe, or…

There was a person leaning over his shoulder to read the Present Mic page. Izuku nearly jumped out of his skin when he heard Aizawa mutter, “Not bad, kid.” This time, he knew to expect the hand that gently patted his shoulder.

“Welcome home, Aizawa,” Shinsou said. “Midoriya’s over for dinner, so we’re actually having food. Yama-dad’s cooking.”

“…Food.” Aizawa’s voice was hoarse, and his eyes were just as shadowed and red as when he’d come to see Shinsou at school. Izuku nodded to him politely as the man gave him a sweeping glance before heading to a different part of the apartment.

“He always naps when he gets home,” Shinsou explained, turning to a new page. “But he keeps forgetting to take out his contacts, so Yama-dad’s probably gonna scold him after Music Hour.”

Izuku smiled at the obvious fondness in Shinsou’s voice. Sure enough, when Yamada returned to the kitchen to start preparing dinner, he shouted over his shoulder for Aizawa to “take your contacts out before your eyes dry up, hon, you’ll feel much better.” Aizawa shuffled into the kitchen within fifteen minutes, groping blindly for the fridge door and extracting a can of iced coffee that he downed in a minute flat. He slouched into a chair facing Yamada and waited for the other man to turn around before signing, *Food?*

Izuku was pretty sure Yamada’s response had something to do with fish, but by that point all the cats in the apartment had begun to gravitate to Aizawa’s chair, meowing loudly. Without changing expression, Aizawa pulled a handful of cat treats from his pocket and distributed them to each cat in turn, giving them a firm pat on the head and a soft rub behind the ears for the elderly Support that

started to climb up onto his lap. Izuku muffled giggles at the behavior of the cats-- they acted like they'd been starved all day!

He looked up in time to see Yamada sign something about *talking* and point to him and Shinsou. He looked at his friend for answers.

"Yamadad says it's rude to talk about people in a language they don't know," Shinsou explained. "Also apparently we're having salmon and rice for dinner, because no one thought to buy vegetables."

"I offered to go shopping on my way home," Aizawa grumbled.

"Cat food and coffee are the only things you buy and we have enough," Yamada rebutted, pulling ingredients out to season the fish. Izuku was still trying to process that they'd apparently been—

"T-Talking about me?" He looked between the adults. "Sorry, I just—"

"Hitoshi's been mentioning you a lot, we just were sharing—" Yamada began.

"Apparently you can dissect any quirk from direct or indirect observation, you want to be a hero like this one" Aizawa jerked his chin at his ward, hands occupied with a very affectionate cat, "and you sneeze like a kitten."

"Wh- wh- why would—" Izuku looked at Shinsou, panicking slightly. "*Why does your dad know how I sneeze?"* He hissed.

“Midoriya, if I could, I would share it with the world,” Shinsou informed him. “Also I texted him and he picked up during a staff meeting.”

“Th- that’s why you were laughing over your phone so much!” Izuku was aghast. “You didn’t, I mean you shouldn’t have, I mean…!” He wanted to hit Shinsou on the arm but didn’t want Aizawa to think he was violent. Or a bad influence. “I-I-I’m so sorry you were disturbed in a meeting, Aizawa-san!”

“Don’t worry about it, my coworkers said it was fine as long as Hitoshi sent video next time.”

Izuku physically couldn’t.

“Ya-Yamada-san, is there anything I can do to help?” He started piling his books together to clear off the table a bit.

“Mind if I see the notebook before you put it away, kid?” Aizawa held out a hand.

Izuku looked at it for what felt like a very long moment. He’d never show his notebook to anyone but Shinsou. Not volume 11, at any rate, Mom had seen volumes 1 through 4 before. And the kids in his fifth grade class had all seen volume 5, laughing and shouting and throwing it around over his head before the teacher took it away and wouldn’t give it back to him for a week.

He’d never really had anyone just ask to see it before, though. And Shinsou obviously thought it was fine, from the way he was nodding his head.

Izuku handed it over and hunched back in his seat, wrapping his arms in the blanket that was somehow still over his shoulders like a cape.

Aizawa took his time reading, face varying between “deadpan,” “deadpan with one eyebrow raised,” “smirk with one eyebrow raised” and “proud smile.” Judging by the last one, Izuku thought he might be reading Shinsou’s page.

Without closing the book or looking up, Aizawa asked, “Why do you want to be a hero?”

Izuku looked around. Yamada was humming at the stove, (Present Mic was preparing him dinner!!) and Shinsou was just watching his guardian with a small smile.

“M-me?”

“No, I’m asking the cat blanket on your head.”

“S-sorry?” For a moment Izuku wasn’t quite sure if he was apologizing for not being the cat blanket, or if he was apologizing for speaking over the blanket. Under. Speaking in place of the blanket? Did the blanket speak?

“Aizawa, maybe hold off on the sarcasm, he’s blue-screening.” Izuku was turning blue? “Midoriya, just ignore him being intimidating, he has resting murder face. Just, um, if it was me asking why you want to be a hero, what would you say?”

With effort, Izuku dragged his eyes away from Aizawa’s impassive expression and met Shinsou’s eyes. If Shinsou were asking?

“To, um, to save people? I think it’s really cool to be able to save someone.” He said, voice low. “I, um. It’s probably silly. Definitely. I- it’s kind of, um, not a great reason?”

“I don’t think it’s silly, keep explaining,” Shinsou prompted. Izuku tried to get his thoughts in line.

“Um, you remember that picture from my wall?”

“The Eraserhead slaying Endeavor like St. George and the Dickhead Dragon one?” Shinsou answered. Izuku could see Yamada's shoulders trembling with laughter.

“N-no! And please stop calling it that!” He mumbled. “No, the- the kind of old one of a lady from the forties?”

“Yeah, you said her name was Beep.”

“Miep! Her, her nickname, anyway. It’s kind of a long story, but I was, um, researching Germany? The president of their national hero academy raised the bar for minority and disability representation, and there was recently a team of five blind heroes that made it big, you know, the Nightlifers?”

“Never heard of it but continue,” Shinsou responded.

“R-right. Um. So the president of the academy is Jewish? And has family who lived through the H-Holocaust. So I was looking through their website for heroics history and I found a reference to Miep Gies,

who helped hide Jewish people during the war to keep them safe and was nearly killed for it. And I found this quote by her." He shyly looked up at Aizawa. "I-it's on the inside of the front cover, you can r-read it if you want."

Aizawa leafed back through the pages to the inside cover and began reading. "'I don't want to be considered a hero. Imagine young people would grow up with the feeling that you have to be a hero to do your human duty. I am afraid nobody would ever help other people because who is a hero? I was not. I was just an ordinary housewife and secretary.'"

"U-um. The one under that." Izuku corrected, wringing his hands. He wished he still had a cat on his lap, Young Man was excellent at quelling his anxiety.

"'But even an ordinary secretary or a housewife or a teenager can, within their own small ways, turn on a small light in a dark room. People should never think that you have to be a very special person in order to help those who need you.'" The words fell with a certain gravity in the silent kitchen.

"Y-yeah." Izuku didn't dare raise his face now. Everything from his forehead to his chin felt hot, and his eyes were prickling. "She didn't have a quirk. I-I mean, no one did back then, but she-- she saved people. She saved their lives as much as she could and she saved their spirits by, by, by showing them that someone was willing to fight for them. To, to lie and give up food and bake a birthday cake on war rations a-and risk her life for theirs. I want, um." He took a shaky breath. "I want to be a hero like her. One who shows people you don't need to be the best to save someone, you just have to care and do everything you can. One who, um, who makes you feel they'll do everything possible to make sure you're alright. No matter wh-who you a-a-" He gulped. "Um. No, no matter what."

Shinsou was definitely staring at him, but Izuku didn't look up. He

couldn’t, not with his vision blurring. Aizawa gave a long, drawn out sigh from his seat, closing the notebook.

“You were right, Hitoshi,” he muttered, sliding the notebook back in front of Izuku. “I do feel like I kicked a puppy. Get him to…” he gestured at Izuku’s quaking shoulders. “Please.”

“Come on, Midoriya, I think I should show you my room. Dinner won’t be ready until the rice is done, anyway.” Shinsou waited for Izuku to stand, then draped an arm over his shoulders. “Shake your head if you want me to stop touching you, okay?”

Izuku nodded, glad he could look only at the hall and the doorway with a purple sign that said “Welcome home, Hitoshi!” at the end of it. One of the cats, he thought it was Sombra, shadowed them from the kitchen and tried to trip Shinsou before he could open the door, purring madly.

“It’s not much, but I like it,” Shinsou prefaced, ushering Izuku in. Now that he was calming down somewhat, Izuku wrapped the cat blanket tighter around his shoulders and gazed around, taking in the light blue paint on the walls and the amount of cat toys littering the floor. Shinsou’s room was about the same size as Izuku’s, but his mostly bare walls and desk made it seem bigger. Other than what looked like a nest of different fuzzy blankets on the unmade futon in various shades of purple, a small space heater by the foot of the desk and a small bookshelf under the window, it looked rather empty.

“Wh-why do you have a welcome home sign?” Izuku ventured.

“Oh, that was something they did after the adoption went through.” Shinsou’s cheeks were pink. “My sort-of aunt went to a hospital and bought all these ‘It’s a Boy’ balloons, it was a whole thing. And then Aizawa's coworkers misunderstood so we got a lot of baby blankets?

The cats ended up loving them, so we kept a few."

Izuku felt a smile growing, expanding from the warmth in his chest. "That s-sounds like they really love you."

Shinsou coughed, face now entirely pink. "Um. Yeah. They uh, tell me that a lot. It's, um, good." As if determined to get away from the embarrassment, Shinsou slumped down into a seat on the floor, dragging one of the blankets over his legs. Sombra startled at the movement and pounced on the blanket, chasing it over Shinsou's legs.

Izuku kind of wanted to ask how old Shinsou had been, and who he'd lived with before, but he had a feeling it wasn't an entirely happy story. And he still had the actual dinner to get through.

"So did you, um, name the cats yourself, or did they come with names already?" he ventured, sitting across from Shinsou and picking up a small stuffed mouse for Sombra. She ignored him entirely.

"I named a few, Aizawa named a few. Yamadad is prohibited from naming animals, he wanted to name two of them Pusheen and Hello Kitty." Shinsou rolled his eyes. "As if the first thing people say to most cats isn't 'hello, kitty,' anyway."

"To, to be fair, I was expecting more, um, puns?" Izuku answered. Shinsou laughed.

"You should see what Aizawa calls them in sign, it's all 'black cat, brown cat, orange cat,' and then Luna is 'idiot cat.'"

"Does he have nicknames for you too?" Izuku asked.

“Well--”

Shou, I love you but just because 'Toshi brought him home does not mean he’s ours now, Hizashi signed, keeping an ear out for the boys.

I owe Sleepy Kid another cat, though. Shouta leaned back in his seat and gestured to his hair like he was pulling up a hood. *Cat ears.*

Midoriya is a human being with parents, they might object. Hizashi was smiling, though. *You’ll have to find another Green Hair Kid somewhere.*

Shouta shook his head. *Green Kid and Sleepy Kid get along well.*

Hizashi cocked his head to the side. *Plant Hair?* He questioned, using a different sign for green that looked like a bushy, springy plant.

Plant Kid. Shouta dropped his hands and turned towards the hall. *We’ll have him over for dinner more, anyway, if he wants to learn.*

“Fine. Boys, dinner time!” Hizashi called, taking the time to lean forward and wrap his arms around Shouta’s shoulders, a brief backwards hug. “Try not to make him cry again?” he said in an undertone.

“No promises, I think he came like that,” Shouta murmured back.

“Wait, so Yamada’s sign name is just “Loud” twice?” Izuku asked, fascinated. “And what’s yours?”

Shinsou grinned. *Sleepy* -- he raised a cupped hand towards his face and pinched four fingers and thumb together in time with his closing eyelids-- *Kid*-- he dropped the hand palm down at chest level and circled it gently.

“And Aizawa?”

Shinsou’s grin grew larger. *Shou Sleepy.*

Izuku groaned. “Howwwwwww did I know there would be a pun?”

“Boys, dinner time!” Yamada called from the kitchen.

“I can’t believe I’m saying this, but you should probably take off the cat blanket,” Shinsou advised. “Yama-dad sometimes tries to gesture while he’s eating, and his chopsticks can be a hazard. Aizawa keeps saying he should wear a bib.”

With some regret, Izuku let the cat hood fall off his head and folded the blanket, setting it at the foot of Shinsou’s futon. Shinsou suppressed a snicker.

“Half of your hair is de-fluffed. I didn’t even know that was possible.”

Izuku frowned, fruitlessly running his fingers through his hair to make it lie flat.

“Aaaaaand it’s all poofy again now. I think your hair might be magic.”

Izuku swore he was not a violent person, but Shinsou seemed to invite him to slap at his arms. Which he did, with prejudice.

“Do you do that because you’re too short to reach my face?”

“Keep- keep it up and you will sink *low enough for me to reach*,” Izuku threatened, turning to exit Shinsou’s room. “Come on, Sombra, let’s go find people who make sense.”

Hizashi didn’t have to be able to see Shouta’s face to recognize his slow smirk of delight when the boys re-entered, having left the cat ear blanket behind.

Plant Kid’s hair stands up like Sleepy Kid’s hair. I think it’s magic, his husband signed to him, an inch away from snickering.

“Words, Shou. Use words around the kids,” Hizashi reprimanded gently.

“Fine.” Shouta turned back to their son and his friend, smile firmly in

place. “Midoriya. Have you ever done martial arts?”

The poor green-haired kid (*plant child,* Shouta’s voice corrected in his mind) looked between Shouta and Hitoshi with an expression of betrayal.

“Wh-why doesn’t anyone here make sense?” He whispered.

Chapter End Notes

The Dadzawa content we've all been waiting for. I probably should have waited on the whole "Aizawa makes sign nicknames for his new son" section, but I just couldn't resist the fluff.

Hitoshi (internally): I have known Izuku for a couple weeks but if anything happened to him I would kill everyone in this city and then myself.

Aizawa (internally): I have known Izuku for less than a day but if anything happened to him I would--

Yamada (internally): I have known Izuku for less than an hour but--

Also Izuku wears a cat hoodie blanket because my sister has a puppy version and also Hitoshi would absolutely think it was hilarious.

I may be putting too much effort into the JSL portions but I actually did research for this so if you're interested in the signs they use for nicknames, check out these links:

"Sleepy": http://station.mdi.cc/PC/index.php?controll_id=sl-102&sign_id=1357
"Green" (there are two signs, Yamada uses "A" first and then the "B"): http://www.syuwabenkyokai.jp/syuwa_words/2008/02/2-00c4.html#heading3
"Loud" (they use the top one with the fist): http://www.syuwabenkyokai.jp/syuwa_words/2008/02/2-d93f.html#heading3

Hope you enjoy the chapter! All Miep Gies quotes are accurate to

the best of my knowledge, feel free to come chat with me in the comments or at thoughtsthroughfog.tumblr.com

:D

Too Much of a Good Thing

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There was probably some sort of rule for friendships that you didn't like, assume your buddy would like something just because you liked it. Hitoshi was pretty sure. His last friend had been some random blue-haired kid when he was three (he thinks, there are a couple crayon doodles he managed to save to that effect anyway) but he was pretty sure that most people didn't want to like, pick their friend up and drop it in a pile of their other favorite things and say "Stay."

Hitoshi thought most people were probably missing out.

Besides, if anyone understood the feeling, he was pretty sure it would be Izuku "My Walls Are A Tribute To All My Favorite Heroes" Midoriya.

Hitoshi's not one to judge. He got the impulse. There were days he'd just wanted to scribble all the words he couldn't say into the plaster walls of his old foster home, write the questions in red so they'd have to see it. Have to notice him and respond. Even if it was just to yell at him for making a mess. When no one acknowledges you at all, you want to be able to leave some proof to yourself that you exist. Sometimes he wondered why All Might sounded so victorious and happy when he cried out "I am here." It never sounded that triumphant when he whispered it to himself.

Anyway.

Midoriya.

To be honest, this hadn't been at all what Hitoshi expected. Not the apologizing after the stairs, or the honest gratitude when Hitoshi used his quirk, and definitely not the actual trust afterwards. Hitoshi had more been expecting the usual reaction, you know, like "He turned me into a newt! Burn the witch!"

Not, "Don't punish him." And definitely not, "Do you want to hang out?"

Like, Hitoshi got loneliness. He'd just never met the poor bastard so lonely they'd consider befriending *him.* And even after three years of living with Aizawa and Yamada, of seeing a therapist and getting used to having people to fall back on, he was just... not used to anyone his age thinking he was worth the trouble.

Which, he guessed, was exactly why he and Midoriya understood each other so well.

Still, if there was one thing Hitoshi should have maybe kept in mind, it was that most people didn't necessarily react… favorably? To being tossed into a new environment. Even if it was a nice environment with lots of cats. He maybe should have remembered how long it had taken him to actually interact with his guardians without falling back on silence and glaring as primary communication methods. Or that Aizawa, while an awesome da--guardian, was honestly shit at making casual conversation, in any situation, ever.

Oh, and that Midoriya tended to cry like a faucet whenever you were the slightest bit nice to him, a trait Hitoshi was sort of hoping he'd grow out of because he didn't have an unlimited supply of spare handkerchiefs, dammit.

Anyway, if he'd thought about it at all, Hitoshi probably could have predicted that a) Midoriya would immediately guess at least one of his

guardians' pro hero identities, b) Aizawa would go off on some bizarre tangent and c) Midoriya would probably definitely cry.

He maybe should have realized that his friend might not necessarily react well to crying in front of strangers, though. Hitoshi was, unfortunately, pretty much used to Midoriya sniffling back tears at the sight of a kitten climbing out of a teacup and falling. He took it so much for granted that he was pretty sure his guardians knew to start preparing extra tissues last week. He really should have recalled the other side of the equation there.

And he really should try and actually, possibly, help Izuku calm down from sobbing hysterically over his salmon, but he had absolutely no idea what to say and it was actually getting concerning how fast his friend was breathing. How the hell did it get like this?

Oh yeah, Aizawa offered to sponsor him to join Hitoshi's self-defense classes, and said he would need to get in shape if he wanted to make it into a hero course. Thanks, *Dad.*

Across the table, Aizawa and Yamada traded looks, like *'Are you serious?'* and *'Hey, it was my turn last time.'* For a second, Hitoshi was pretty sure they were going to play jan-ken-pon to decide who stayed and who left. At his right, Midoriya curled in further into his seat and covered his face with both hands.

Aizawa huffed out a sigh, pushed away from the table and motioned for Yamada and Hitoshi to leave the room. *I'll handle Plant Kid now scoot*, is how he put it, actually, but Hitoshi took the hint, and his plate, and scooted.

"Now, kid, I want you to listen to me and breathe in when I count to three, okay?" he heard his guardian say. "I'm gonna stay right here."

Shouta was, unfortunately, very used to helping people through panic attacks and crying jags. Nemuri used to be prone to them, especially around testing times, and it had been a struggle to calm her down before her quirk flared up in self-defense. Panic attack plus crowd of helpful bystanders in snoozeland had been rather inconvenient for all involved.

He was kind of hoping the calm voice and counting would be enough for Midoriya, because Nemuri tended to prefer gripping his hands like a pregnant woman giving birth and he really didn't want to associate that image with this tiny fluffy green child.

Thankfully, the kid followed directions pretty well, and was soon breathing slowly, even if he kept crying miserably. Shouta really wished the cat blanket was still on hand.

"Can you talk now, kid?"

Midoriya shrugged a shoulder but managed a quiet, "Mm-hmm."

"Are you good with me here, or do you want Hitoshi instead?"

The kid curled impossibly smaller. "Y-y-you," he whispered.

"Okay. Do you want to talk about it, or do you want me to distract you?" He pulled his chair over and sat at Midoriya's side, leaning down to try and meet the kid's eyes. "I'm good with either, but I'd like

to know what set this off."

Midoriya's hands twisted together, hard enough he was probably hurting his fingers. Bad habit, but it's not like Hitoshi didn't have those when they got him. Some kids lean on physical pain to cope when they're hurting in other ways.

"I-i-it was," Midoriya gulped. "It wa-wa-was nice of you. The dojo. But I-I-I ca-ca-" he started to shudder again.

"Okay, you don't have to say it. Just nod or shake your head," Shouta ordered. "Is it that you don't want to?"

Fervent head-shake, sending all that green hair flopping. Shouta hummed.

"Is it the money? Because we get a discount, I'm sure we could make it work."

The kid lifted a shoulder. Somewhat about the money, then.

"If it's about permission, I can talk to your parents," he ventured. The kid flinched back into his chair. Bingo.

"M-m-my mom. Wouldn't l-l-like it," Midoriya ventured, eyes darting up to meet his. "Sh-sh-she thinks Ka-ka-kacchan w-w-would-- a-a-and it's not li-, not like I could h-h-hurt anyone, but--" the kid took a deep breath, "I-I-I'm just too, too *weak*."

“So… you think your mother wouldn’t approve… because she thinks you’ll fight someone and get hurt?” Shouta tried, looking the kid up and down. From what he’d seen, and what Hitoshi told him, this was the kind of kid who’d try to stand up for someone else but never for his own sake. “It’s not MMA, kid, this is just the kind of stuff that teaches you how to take a hit and put the other guy down so you can get away.”

Midoriya let out what could have been a laugh if his face weren’t so bleak. “I a-already know how to take a hit.”

Shouta sighed, rummaging through his pockets for a pack of tissues, now that all the crying seemed to be done. “I’m sure you do, kiddo. It’s not a bad thing to know how to fight back though, you know? Heroes fight to protect others, but the first person they have to be able to protect is themselves.” The kid’s face dropped even further at that, like Shouta had just smashed his dreams and ground his face in the remains. Fuck.

“Look, normally I wouldn’t tell you this, but I think it’s something you’ll want to hear. I’ve told Hitoshi, at any rate.” Shouta turned, fully facing Midoriya. “There’s a time for every hero, when their quirk is not enough. Either they’re in a situation where their quirk would actively make things worse, or they’re too tired to use it. Some heroes make it to the top before they hit that point, and some face it as soon as they graduate and meet their first villain. I’ve seen people deal with that situation and run away as far as possible, even quit the hero scene.”

He stared at Midoriya’s wide-open eyes, patient and serious. “I can’t say that you’ll make a good hero. I can’t tell you you’ll fulfill your dreams. But I can say this…” he raised a hand, poking a finger at Midoriya’s chest. “In that same situation, if you learn, you will have an advantage that those heroes will never discover.”

Midoriya looked taken aback at that. “A-a-an advantage?”

“Think on it,” Shouta advised. “I won’t ask you about the dojo more tonight, but I will talk with your mother about it if you want me to.”

Midoriya nodded, somewhat more thoughtful than resigned now that he’d been given a riddle to think over.

“Now, I know you’re tired and the last thing you want to do right now is think,” he continued, “but Hizashi and Hitoshi are probably pretty worried. If you have to go home, I can drive you back and make sure you get there. But if you don’t, I’m pretty sure they’re in the living room right now setting out blankets and arguing over which animated movie would be most appropriate to make you feel better.” Plus, Hitoshi had asked them to buy extra clothing a little while back, so he was pretty sure the kid was aiming to turn this into an impromptu sleepover. Shouta was fine with it as long as they asked the kid’s mom, to be honest, since he was pretty sure Midoriya would crash soon anyway. Part of the reason he didn’t want the kid taking a train tonight.

In response, Midoriya actually gave him a small, watery smile. Shouta resisted the urge to pat him on his fluffy, fluffy head.

“D-do you, um, have H-Hercules?” He asked. Shouta grimaced.

“We do not,” he lied. Truthfully, he just found that movie’s message about heroes and mass marketing irritating as hell. “But Hitoshi’s always up to watch Mulan.” Which had much better messages about learning to use your own smarts and skills, and an extremely funny dragon.

Midoriya nodded, gave him another smile, and got up, braving the first few steps towards the living room. Before he reached the door, he

turned and gave a quick bow. “Th-thank, um. *Thank you*, Aizawa-san.”

“Any time, kid,” he returned, getting up to start clearing the table. “Tell Hizashi I’ll be there once the hot chocolate’s done.”

That got him a real smile, before the kid bowed again and left. Shouta cleared his throat once, then again, rubbing at an eye. “Damn kids,” he muttered, getting down the cocoa powder and mini marshmallows.

Chapter End Notes

> Not entirely happy with how this turned out, but I also was kind of dying to have that "advantage you have over other heroes" conversation happen. One day I will write a chapter where Izuku does not cry even a little. Maybe.
>
> Normal brain: Inko has a photo album of “reasons my son is crying” that she continually updates. Reasons include: his all might alarm clock ran out of batteries (age 4), he realized he’ll never be seven feet tall (age seven), our neighbor’s dog died (age 12), all might said he could be a hero (age 14), he figured out Santa is not actually a teleportation quirk user (age 16) and more
> Better brain: Inko turns the album into a blog called “reasons my son is crying”
> Galaxy brain: Inko shows the photo album to Aizawa and they co-moderate the official “reasons pro hero deku is crying” blog once he graduates

(Dis)Advantage

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was never completely clear to Izuku what precisely convinced his mother to allow him to join Hitoshi in aikido.

(“You have fallen asleep on my shoulder in a cat hoodie blanket. I have pictures. You are no longer allowed to refer to me by last name,” Shins-- *Hitoshi* had corrected him when he left after the movie. “I’m still stuck on whether to call you Izu, Zuku or Midori, though. Don’t worry, it’ll come to me.”)

Whether it was the hesitant conversation Izuku had begun when he returned from the Aizawa-Yamada home, eyes red and hair liberally covered in cat fur, or the “pros of self-defense training” list Hitoshi had helped him write and paste on the fridge, or the conversation Aizawa himself had initiated on Friday night, showing up dressed for battle in actual slacks and a mostly-clean-shaven face, the result was the same. Izuku was joining Hitoshi in his aikido lessons.

Or, well, to be precise, Izuku was attending the same dojo as Hitoshi, but in the beginner class. Most of the other students were between seven and ten years old. Izuku would have been embarrassed to join them, but he was too busy enjoying the experience of being the “good example” for the class.

The dojo focused entirely on quirkless self-defense, partially because aikido as a style predated the evolution of quirks, and partially because quirk use in self-defense was a legally thorny subject.

(Minors tended to have some leeway since they were assumed to have less control over their powers, but starting at age 15, quirk use in self-

defense by civilians was deemed potentially lethal and could result in anything from a fine to manslaughter charges. The government was serious in discouraging any behavior that could lead to vigilantism.)

Anyway, Izuku had found that his observational skills and talent for mimicking movement helped him in class, and Kawai-sensei had apparently told Aizawa that if Izuku continued to improve at his current pace, he'd be eligible to test into Hitoshi's intermediate class within six months.

Izuku smiled to himself as he knelt on the padded practice mats, eyes closed in meditation-- Kawai-sensei had them meditate before and after class to "ready their minds" for learning. On his right, little Satsuki Asui shuffled in her squatted position. Her partial frog mutation made kneeling in seiza too awkward for her ankle joints.

Asui-chan, ("Please call me Tsuki-chan"), tended to be his partner in blocking drills. She'd grabbed his sleeve the first day, dragging him to a spot in the corner because apparently "Green should stick together." When he'd told Hitoshi about it, in between rambling thoughts about the efficacy of certain moves he'd learned, his friend had nodded thoughtfully.

("So that's one more vote for Midori as your nickname. I'll update the tally."

"Update the—? Hi-Hitoshi, who have you been asking?"

"That's for me to know and you to wonder about forever.")

Izuku was pretty sure Asu—Tsuki-chan had mainly chosen him as a partner because she wanted to practice with a taller opponent. She might be only seven, but with her economy of motion and the advantage of a lower center of gravity, she'd make a terrifying opponent once she was old enough to build up some muscle mass. That, and she hit surprisingly hard.

“Thanks, Midori-chan,” she whispered. “But it’s meditation time.”

Izuku squeezed his eyes shut, whispered back an apology and tried to focus only on his breathing. In and out, slow and steady, in through the nose and out through the mouth. Trying not to force his mind blank, but to accept the thoughts that came and allow them to float away, harmless as dandelion seeds on the breeze.

Kawai-sensei clapped her hands, signaling them to stand, bow, and start on their warm-up exercises. Izuku huffed and puffed his way through jumping jacks, push-ups, sit-ups and slapping falls, rolling down to his side and slapping the ground to disperse the force of the fall.

(Izuku had finished the first class and met a smirking Hitoshi in the changing room.

“How was your first class?”

“I-It was awesome! We practiced punching and some basic blocks and.. how to…”

“Fall?” Hitoshi’s smirk grew. “Izu, did you fall for someone else already?”

Izuku had been forced to thwack Hitoshi repeatedly with his uniform top before the other boy would stop giggling.)

Izuku liked to think he’d managed to bulk up a bit since starting lessons, especially since he’d taken to doing push-ups and stretches at night and in the morning as well. Not that you could tell from his noodly arms, but, well, he could hope.

“Midori-chan,” Tsuki reminded him. “It’s your turn to attack.”

Pulling his mind back to the present, Izuku nodded and waited for her to shift into her ready stance before he stepped forward to push her lightly. She deflected his arms with a slight frown, then attacked in return, striking quickly. Izuku deflected and readied himself to try again.

“Midori-chan… can I ask you something?” The little girl looked oddly serious.

“S-sure.” They didn’t pause in their pattern, back and forth flowing smoothly.

“Can you attack like you mean it?”

Izuku drew back slightly, feeling somewhat stung.

“Wh-what?”

“I need to be able to practice hard in order to get better. That’s what my sister always says. So I should get better if I fight someone stronger. But it doesn’t help me if you act gentle.”

Izuku couldn’t really say anything to that. “S-sorry, Tsu-Tsuki-chan. I-I-I didn’t mean to—“

“I know,” she said, calmly. “You’re nice, so you don’t want to hurt me. But if someone else attacks me, they won’t be nice. I’m small, and I’m not strong… yet. But if I get used to fighting people who are bigger and stronger, I’ll be prepared for when I need to fight for real.”

Izuku's eyes widened. "Y-you're right. I'm sorry." He took a deep breath and settled back into his ready stance. "Th-then, please get ready." Tsuki nodded sharply at him, and he pressed forward quickly, hands impacting her shoulders. When she rolled into a fall and bounced back up, her face was split in a wide grin.

"My turn!" She chirped, surging forward and forcing him back a step. Izuku caught himself before he staggered back into another practicing pair and found himself echoing her smile. She was right, of course. No one learned how to get stronger by fighting a weak opponent. Hadn't someone said adversity was the best teacher? And since he was, a little, somewhat like Tsuki if you thought about it-- outweighed, outclassed, disadvantaged, (disabled)-- he'd pretty much always be… fighting… a stronger… That was it!

When Aizawa came to pick up him and Hitoshi for their carpool, Izuku was almost vibrating out of his skin with exhilaration.

"Hey, kiddos—"

"I-I figured it out!" Izuku cried, cutting off Aizawa's languid greeting. Hitoshi and Aizawa exchanged a quirked eyebrow glance and looked back at him. He shrank back a little.

"S-sorry for inter--, for interrupting, Aizawa-san. An-and thank you for, for the ride. But!" He clenched his fists, grinning up at the man, heart racing with exhilaration. "I figured it out! My advantage, the one you, um, t-talked about."

Aizawa held out a hand for their backpacks and herded them out of the dojo. “Tell me in the car, kid. I want to hear, but I have to drop you and Hitoshi off soon.”

“O-oh.” Izuku hurried to catch up (stupid tall people and their long legs). “Drop, drop both of us?”

“Hizashi and I have work this weekend. Your mom volunteered to watch the two of you tonight and tomorrow.” Izuku felt his jaw drop. Two days? And Hitoshi would get to stay? This was going to be awesome! They could watch movies and, and read some of Izuku’s comics and maybe even practice more aikido up on the apartment complex roof if the weather was good, or maybe they could—

“Not to stop your planning, but didn’t you have something to tell me?” Aizawa cut in, glancing back to check they had their seatbelts on before starting the car. Izuku yanked himself out of his daydreaming, smiling nervously at Shinsou, who looked far too amused.

“Y-yeah. I was pr-practicing with Tsuki, um, she’s seven, and she said something that made me realize. I, um, I’m weaker than most people with quirks, I mean, practically all people with quirks unless it’s something like changing your hair color or, or something that negatively impacts your health. I-I would always be fighting at a disadvantage.”

Aizawa hummed thoughtfully. “And so?”

Izuku grinned. “S-so if I get into a situation where I can’t use my strengths, I’ll be prepared to use something else. If, if I get skilled enough, I won’t be scared to fight a stronger opponent. I just have to, to learn how to use their strength against them.”

Aizawa grinned, fierce and satisfied. “You let them have the upper hand. And then you use it to pull them down and kick ‘em somewhere tender. That’s it, kid.” Without glancing away from the road, the man took a hand from the wheel and reached back, patting Izuku firmly on the head.

Hitoshi chuckled, copying his guardian and giving Izuku a quick noogie. “So that’s what you were muttering about after class. I thought maybe you’d managed to give someone a bloody nose again.”

“Shin-- um, H-Hitoshi-kun, that was an accident,” Izuku hissed, darting a glance at Aizawa in the mirror. It looked like he was holding back a smile.

“Well, accident or not, that is one kid who will never insult Eraserhead in front of you again.” Hitoshi snickered at the tomato red of Izuku’s face.

“I-I didn’t MEAN to hit h-him! I was talking about how Er-Eraserhead uses his capture weapon instead of depending on his quirk, and I just gestured a little, and, and his face hit my hand! A-and I SAID I was sorry!” Izuku huffed, crossing his arms. He did feel terrible about Kobayashi-san’s bloody nose, but mainly he was just embarrassed that he--

“It would have been less funny if you hadn’t tried to bow in apology and immediately head-butted him in the face.” Hitoshi had been lucky enough to walk into the room at that point and had laughed so hard he couldn’t stand upright for another ten minutes. “And then he tried to complain to the teacher and she told h-him--” Hitoshi was finally too breathless with laughter to go on.

“She s-said she thought he’d misunderstood blocking if he- if he was trying to do it with his face.” Izuku smiled again at the memory. “It

was nice that she believed me ab- about it being an accident.”

Hitoshi nodded. “Sensei’s pretty fair like that. No matter which Sensei it is.”

Kawai-sensei’s quirk allowed her to make multiple corporeal clones that shared a mental link, which came in extremely handy for a teacher of a small dojo who had to cover multiple classes. The only real downside was that if one of the clones was injured, she'd be hurt too, unlike Ectoplasm's clone technique which did not transfer injuries. Izuku was awed not just by her quirk, but by her work ethic--she’d obviously trained hard to make sure all of her clones were remarkably solid and stable. Izuku kind of wished he could make a clone like that so he’d be able to watch more hero fights and still make it to school. Not that he hated school, it was just, he knew that pretty much everyone else there would prefer he didn’t attend. Or didn’t exist. He’d heard Bakugou tell him to disappear more than he’d heard anyone use his actual name.

“Teachers should be unbiased enough to treat all students equally, but aware enough of their students to recognize when they need extra help,” Aizawa interjected. “Ignoring kids with special needs or letting them struggle is the mark of a useless adult.”

“Y-you really, um, care about education,” Izuku responded, fishing a little for information. After weeks of knowing Aizawa, all he really knew about the man was that he looked perpetually sleep-deprived, loved cats, and seemed strangely knowledgeable about heroes.

“Aizawa works at a school,” Hitoshi explained, wearing that faint ‘I’ve got a secret’ smirk he sometimes got when they talked about his family.

“Which, um, which one?” Izuku asked, not really expecting an answer.

“I could tell you,” Aizawa said, deadpan. “But I’d--”

“Have to kill you,” Hitoshi finished, nodding along. Izuku pouted down at his hands. He understood secrets, but he hated unsatisfied curiosity.

“Do I have to be a- a level ten friend to unlock your tragic backstory?” He muttered, only a little bit not joking. Hitoshi nudged his leg, somewhat comforting and somewhat admonishing.

“Izu-kun, I would sell you my tragic backstory for a jelly donut. Aizawa’s… kind of not kidding about his job confidentiality, though.” Hitoshi was unnaturally serious, well, serious for him. “I’m not even really supposed to know.”

Izuku sighed and leaned back in his seat, accepting that that was all he’d get. For now, at least. He wasn’t very good at leaving interesting things alone.

As they neared his home, silence reigned in the car. Aizawa shrugged and turned the radio on after a couple minutes, tuning in to an American pop channel Izuku recognized as the same channel Present Mic used for his nighttime talk shows. Stopped at a light a couple blocks from his neighborhood, Izuku spotted a Mr. Donut corner store.

“Hitoshi.” He poked his friend’s shoulder and pointed at the store. “Jelly donut?”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the wait! I was traveling for work and time zone changes DO NOT agree with me. Hope you like the Obligatory Training Chapter (tm), and next chap. will be Izuku and Hitoshi's

sleepover! I've been planning that part for a couple weeks, so hopefully the next update should happen sooner :D Thanks for reading!

Sleepovers, Swears and Secrets

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Izuku made a lot more sense when you met his mom, Hitoshi reflected. It was sort of like how people said he'd come to look like Aizawa after he'd been adopted. Apparently they smiled the same now? Hitoshi didn't really see it, but whatever.

Izuku and his mom didn't look much alike, either. Oh, you could see that the green highlights in his hair were his mom's, and the contented-hamster roundness of his cheeks, but his extremely fluffy hair and scattering of freckles were probably from the other side of his family (not that there were any photographs of Mr. Midoriya he could see to check).

But when they walked in the door, Mrs. Midoriya did the Izuku Lip Tremble that meant 'I am overcome with an emotion and may burst into tears' as she greeted them and thanked Aizawa for setting up the sleepover. She wrung her hands just like Izuku did as she asked whether Hitoshi needed help carrying his sleepover bag to Izuku's room, and that beaming smile when she announced that dinner would be Hitoshi's favorite curry was pure Izuku Sunshine Smile.

As Hitoshi began laying out his borrowed futon on Izuku's floor, he took a deep breath of relief. Nothing against Mrs. Midoriya in the slightest, but she was almost intimidatingly nice. Disney Princess nice, the kind that made you check over your shoulders for swarms of happily chirping bluebirds. She'd sent Aizawa off with a tupper-ware of curry leftovers and a tiny note folded in the shape of a cat. He was pretty sure he'd never seen his guardian's eyes go quite that wide before. He just hoped he could make it through the next day without convincing her he was too much of a petty bastard to be friends with her son.

“Do you w-want to watch a movie after dinner?” Izuku asked, bouncing slightly on the balls of his feet. “Or we have some computer games, or-or-or Monopoly but Mom always wins, and, um, I thought maybe we could practice aikido in the morning? Or go to the mall and see if they h-have any new issues of *Heroes International* or--”

“It all sounds good,” Hitoshi said honestly. “My brain’s a bit too fried for board games, though.” Plus sitting around in a circle trying to count fake money *for fun* sounded like a unique form of torture, but meh. “Mall could be fun, I need to get Yamadad something for his birthday.”

“O-oh, when is it?” Izuku stopped bouncing and knelt down to help Hitoshi spread the comforter over the futon.

“July 7th, a week after mine.”

“Oh! Mine is July 15th.” Izuku smiled. “I g-guess we’re all Cancers then.”

Hitoshi placed a hand over his heart. “Are you calling me a cancer on society? Izuku, I thought we were friends!”

Izuku raised a pillow threateningly. Hitoshi reached for another, preparing for battle.

“Izu-kun~~, Shinsou-kun~~, Dinner’s ready~~~~” Mrs. Midoriya called out. The pillows were gently placed on Hitoshi’s newly-made bed, a dinnertime détente already in effect. Hitoshi pulled his shoulders back. Once more into the breach.

“Thank you for the meal, Midoriya-san,” he greeted, bowing slightly. “It smells delicious.”

“No need to be so formal, Shinsou-kun. Izuku’s told me so much about you, I feel like I know you already,” she dismissed, waving a hand towards his seat.

“Oh really?” Hitoshi turned to his right, where Izuku had begun to hunch over, face crimson. “If he said anything good, it was all lies.”

“He did say that you were an amazing friend,” Mrs. Midoriya mused. “But that you have a... punfortunate tendency in jokes.”

Izuku slid further down in his seat, groaning, “Mom, noooooooooo.”

Hitoshi perked up.

“Was that intentional… or punintentional?”

“Welll~”

“Mom, whatever you do, don’t do the joke.” Izuku tried. He was ignored.

“Now that you mention it, I know a great joke that Izuku used to love,” Mrs. Midoriya snapped her fingers and pointed at Hitoshi. “What is All Might’s favorite sandwich?”

“Is it a gyro sandwich?”

“Please Mom no.”

“It is a hero sandwich with Extra Just-fries!” Mrs. Midoriya patted her son on the shoulder, ignoring his subvocal whine. “Izuku came up with that when he was four years old!”

“Mom, why.”

“That must have been adorable,” Hitoshi commented, taking a bite of his curry. “I have no idea what I was like at four, but it probably didn’t include All Might puns.”

“M-mom, if you bring out the photo albums, I will hide in my room,” Izuku pronounced.

“Don’t worry, baby, the photo albums are safe,” Mrs. Midoriya placated. Relieved, Izuku took a big mouthful of curry. “But I *did* just unearth some of our old home videos.”

Hitoshi cackled while Izuku, still chewing, looked between his mother and his friend in betrayal and horror.

“I think we’re going to get along just fine, Midoriya-san,” Hitoshi said. “And this curry is just to *dine* for."

“Oh my god Hitoshi why are we friends.”

Hitoshi blinked at the screen, caught between hilarity and shock. A four-year-old Izuku was running around in an All Might onesie, shouting “DIE SHI-Y CWIMNALS,” along with a blond brat he somewhat recognized from school.

“Uhhhhh…” He looked between Izuku and the screen. “Explanation please?”

“Oh, that was all Kacchan’s influence,” Mrs. Midoriya stated. “His parents don’t believe in censorship, and Izuku picked it up from him. I had a devil of a time teaching him which words weren’t appropriate for a child.”

“GO TO HELL, DICKHEAD!” screeched baby blond brat. Mrs. Midoriya nodded, point made.

“So how did” he gestured at tiny Izuku, middle finger raised high in the air as he ran after his friend, “turn into” he gestured at his tomato-faced friend with his head buried in his hands. “Pretty sure Izuku *never* swears.”

“Oh, we went with a reward system in the end. For every week he used his best language, he got 100 yen to save for hero merch. And every day he did say a swear word, no candy after dinner.”

Hitoshi thought back on Izuku’s walls plastered with posters and his shelf of action figures. “That makes sense.”

“Also, I told him All Might himself *never* said a swear word because swearing was for villains,” Mrs. Midoriya added. Elsewhere, several cities away, All Might himself stubbed his toe against the counter while preparing dinner and intoned a heartfelt, “MOTHERFUCKER.”

“I suggested the Bakugous do something similar for Kacchan, but they apparently prefer a different style of parenting.” From the face Mrs. Midoriya pulled, it was clear she was dubious. “I hear he still has a bit of a potty mouth."

“Oh yeah, he definitely told me to fuck off and die the other day,” Hitoshi answered. Mrs. Midoriya and Izuku gave identical “eep!” noises of surprise. Maybe because it was the first time he’d sworn since he arrived? “Uh, shi-sorry, whoops?”

“I’d say no candy after dinner, but Izuku went and bought those donuts already,” Mrs. Midoriya reflected. “Plus, if your parents don’t mind, it’s not really my place.”

“H-he doesn’t really swear a lot, Mom,” Izuku said uncertainly. “O-only when something’s wrong or, or he’s quoting Kacchan.”

“Izu-kun, I honestly have no room to judge,” Mrs. Midoriya assured him. “My parents stopped trying to wash my mouth out with soap when I was thirteen. I only intervened when you were a kid because I wanted you to know that other people would be shocked by what you thought was natural speech.”

Izuku looked like his mind had been blown.

“You’re almost fourteen now, and I’m sure a lot of your peers will be trying out new language. Just make sure you know what something means before you say it, try not to call someone a word you wouldn’t

use to describe yourself, and don't get in the habit of saying things that could be seen as--"

"--racist, sexist, quirkist, ableist, age-ist, or ju-judging people of different religious, economic and social backgrounds," Izuku completed. "S-so you really don't mind if, if I s-say…" he looked down, then up, and whispered, "shit?"

Hitoshi burst out laughing. "Yeah, no, I can't. You're hereby banned from bad words, Izu."

Mrs. Midoriya was covering her mouth, but her shoulders were shaking. "No candy after dinner, Izu-kun."

"Awwww." He actually looked disappointed. Hitoshi slipped sideways down the couch, still snickering.

"I was just joking, honey."

"Oh, phew."

"Or was I?"

"Mom, pl-- wait, Hitoshi, are you okay?" Izuku peered down at his friend, slid halfway to the floor.

"I-Izu, I've fallen and I can't get up!" Hitoshi cackled. He actually thought he might be crying a little.

“Mom, let’s ju-just leave him there all night.”

“Oh, I’m headed to bed, but you two have a good night. Don’t stay up too late, and please don’t wake me up before 8 tomorrow.” Mrs. Midoriya stepped around Shinsou’s giggling form. “Have a nice trip, Shinsou, see you next fall.”

“Yessss!” Hitoshi shouted.

“Mom, he used that one already!” Izuku complained.

“Lights out at ten, boys,” she blew them both a kiss and swanned out of the room.

“Haha- ha- ahhhh,” Hitoshi finally got his breath back under control, pulling himself back onto the couch. “Your mom is awesome.”

“Yes, she is.” Izuku nodded. “Wanna trade?”

“Nah, I don’t think I could handle being nice the whole time.” Hitoshi noticed Izuku’s face twist slightly. “What?”

“It’s nothing.” He still looked troubled. Hitoshi nudged his foot. “I can tell you later. Tragic backstory, yeah?”

“Jelly donut first.” Hitoshi pushed Izuku lightly, chivvying him to the

kitchen. “I want the raspberry one.”

In bed, teeth brushed and lights dimmed (except for the All Might nightlight Hitoshi had *totally known* Izuku would have), Hitoshi curled up under the blankets and met Izuku’s eyes.

“You really wanna know?”

“O-only if you want to tell me,” Izuku answered seriously. “It’s n-not my business, really. I’m just curious.”

Hitoshi shrugged. “I don’t really wanna give my whole life story. It’s pretty long and boring. And it’s not like I wanna talk about myself all night.”

“Question for a question?” Izuku offered, shuffling down so he could prop himself up on his elbows, peering at Hitoshi over the pillow. “And we can veto which- um, whichever ones we don’t want to answer.”

“Deal.” Hitoshi reached out for a handshake, semi-serious.

“So… where did you live before Aizawa and Yamada?” Izuku asked. Hitoshi supposed that would be the first question he asked, too.

“Foster home. Started living there when I was about three, I think. The whole organization got investigated when I was around nine,

some kids had gone missing and turned up in a couple… organizations. I met Aizawa around that time, he offered to take me in when the home switched management." All true, minus some key details. "Took me a while to get used to people who wanted to be, you know, parental. Uhhh… what happened with you and Blondie? Seemed like you were pretty close friends." Hitoshi regretted the question a little when he saw Izuku wince.

"We were. O-or at least, I thought we were. He was always really… adventurous? You know, first one to. to start a new game and a pretty natural l-leader. I... looked up to him a lot. But…" Izuku rolled over, staring up at the ceiling. "I don't think he ever really liked *me.* A-as a friend. N-not just as someone who would follow him ar- around and say he was cool. And when he got his quirk and I didn't get mine… I think he decided I w-wasn't good enough to even follow him anymore."

"Did he start the bullying?" Hitoshi asked quietly.

"...He didn't stop it," Izuku replied, equally softly. "Anyway. Your turn."

"Right."

"Um…" Izuku rolled back over. "Why did you transfer to Musutafu?"

"Couple reasons. Yamada wanted a bigger apartment. Aizawa wanted to live a bit closer to his school. But mainly… people at my school found out about my quirk. And some of them decided, if they never spoke to me, they wouldn't have to be afraid of it."

"Oh no…" Izuku whispered.

“Yeah. Even the teachers wouldn’t call on me. It’s not like I would have used my quirk on them anyway! I know how to control it!” Now. He knew how to control it *now*. “But it was like being invisible, the whole day. They’d talk about me, right in front of me. But they wouldn’t let me say a word.”

Izuku sat up, moving to sit on the floor next to Hitoshi, leaning against his bed. He pulled the blanket down to cover his knees.

“In fifth grade, Kacchan-- um, Bakugou, thought it would be f-funny to get everyone in class to ignore me. I don’t know why. They wouldn’t even hand me homework in c-class if the teacher passed it out. They got bored of it after a few weeks, but… it was horrible. I’m sorry they did that to you.”

“Thanks.” Hitoshi looked away and cleared his throat. “I’m sorry, too. You didn’t deserve it.”

Izuku lifted a shoulder, looking down. “At least I had my mom.”

“Yeah, you’re lucky,” Hitoshi murmured, a little sleepy now. They sat (well, lay in Hitoshi’s case) in silence for a while. Through the apartment walls, a neighbor’s TV program carried through in indistinct murmuring tones.

“M-hmm.” Izuku kept looking down, face closed. “Hitoshi? Can I tell you something?”

Hitoshi propped himself up on one elbow, rubbing at his eyes. “Sure.”

“I heard my mom once, with Mrs. Bakugou. She was saying that maybe if she’d gotten pregnant earlier, I would have gotten the quirk gene… or something.”

Hitoshi’s heart sank. “Izuku…”

“But if she had… that kid wouldn’t be *me*. I looked up DNA and genes and things, sometimes people think that it’s the father’s DNA that determines whether you get a quirk, b-but it’s not entirely clear because there are a couple different genes involved and they’re mostly on X-chromosomes. I didn’t really understand it at the time. But I kept on thinking about the kid Mom would have… rather had. If she w-wanted a girl or a boy. If they would have had telekinesis or fire powers. If K-Kacchan would have had a better friend, if Dad would have--” Izuku’s voice stayed in a horrible, quiet monotone. Resigned. “It never felt like I deserved to be born… you know, as me. When everyone would have preferred a different Izuku.”

“I understand why you feel that but please shut up about a better you,” Hitoshi answered, once he was sure Izuku was done. He’d sat up, and started to move forward so he could sit next to his friend. “As far as I’m concerned, you are the best possible Izuku in any world. You’re my friend, and I don’t let anyone talk shit about my friends. Okay?”

“Okay,” Izuku responded, voice tiny and wavering. Hitoshi slung an arm around his shoulders.

“Good, because I will personally kick your ass if I hear anything more about deserving to be born. Nobody *deserves* anything like that. We just get to be grateful we’re here.”

“Okay.”

“And if you don’t feel grateful, that’s okay. Just come talk to me. I’m always gonna be grateful you’re here.”

Izuku nodded and slumped sideways, a warm weight against Hitoshi’s ribs. “Y-you too, okay? And thanks.”

“Anytime, Izu.”

“Okay.”

“And I meant it about kicking your ass.”

“Okay.”

“I know aikido.”

“Goodnight, Hitoshi.”

They shuffled their way back into their respective beds. Hitoshi wished, briefly and fervently, that his cats were here. No one could feel sad with five cats all trying to steal their blankets. The sixth would, of course, be on their pillow attempting to sleep on their face.

“Goodnight, Izuku.”

———-

“Izuku. Izuku! Wake up!”

“Mmmfgh.”

“Wake up!”

”Ughhhh... wha’ timezzit?”

”3 a.m. now LISTEN.”

”Wha’...?”

”Izuku. What did All Might have for dinner in America?”

”I’unno, i' wasn’t in th'article. Why?”

”He had a Liber-Tea and Just-Fries for All.”

“....” Izuku flopped over to direct a glare at Hitoshi’s shit-eating grin.

”A Little Tea and Just Fries? Which one do you think works better?”

“Hitoshi. If it weren’t for the laws of this land I would—“ Izuku swallowed a yawn. “Murder you. Lemme sleep.”

”You would burger me? I’m intrigued.”

”Hitoshi.”

”Hm?”

”No offense but go the FUCK to sleep.”

”Izu! You said a swear! No candy after dinner!” Hitoshi was aware he was, as the kids might say, cruising for a bruising.

Izuku pointedly rolled over. “Too tired to murder you. Morning. Kill.”

”’Night Izuku. Sweet dreams,” he said, just to be annoying.

”Mmf.”

Hitoshi rolled over and took out his phone, dimming the screen light reflexively. “Scrolling for cat pics it is,” he murmured to himself.

An All Might plushie sailed over from Izuku’s bed and landed on his lap.

”SLEEP.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah, g’night.”

Chapter End Notes

I hope this came out well! I've been planning their sleepover "confessions" for a while now, so I hope I got the tone right.
Re: swearing baby Izuku. Children are language mimics. If Bakugou heard swearwords at home (which he probably did), he would absolutely say them as a kid and Izuku absolutely would have picked up the habit before he knew better. I'm not sure I wrote Inko all that well, but she does seem like the kind of Mom to use reward systems to encourage good behavior.

re: the bad pun. Just-fries is a terrible attempt at "justice". Liber-tea and (justice) for all. It isn't a good joke, but it is a very "first joke a kid makes up" sort of pun.

Re: The overheard conversation. Inko definitely did not mean it how Izuku interpreted it, i.e. "My mom wishes she had a different child." She was saying something pretty common among parents of kids w/ disabilities, "I wish I had passed down better genes so my child could be healthier/wouldn't have to go through difficulties." Still not a great thing to hear, but understandable.

Anyway, enjoy the fluffy angst!

Mornings

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Despite going to sleep at ...probably 4 am, considering the cat videos… Hitoshi was the first one awake. It wasn't that he usually woke up early in the mornings (that was what cats were for), or that he'd managed to trick his circadian rhythms into the perfect cycle of light and REM sleep (healthy sleep was for people with schedules, purpose, and commitment to being the best that they could be. Hitoshi could manage maybe one of those at a time).

It was… well, to be blunt, it was Izuku's sleep-talking. The kind of indistinct, background mumbles Hitoshi could have tolerated, but when Izuku started snickering at 7 am about "something something chicken kitchen?", he gave up and left to acquire caffeine.

The Midoriyas' kitchen, while somewhat tiny and cramped compared to his own apartment, was extremely clean and well-organized. Hitoshi briefly considered raiding the fridge for any left-over donuts, but the thought of Izuku's puppy-eyed look of Extreme Disappointment and Crushed Hopes killed that plan. Instead, he checked the cabinet over the coffee maker for mugs, and started the machine he'd seen Mrs. Midoriya re-fill after dinner.

Considering the first time Izuku saw him drink coffee, he'd been horrified that Hitoshi might "risk stunting his growth," it was pretty clear Mrs. Midoriya was the coffee fiend of the family. To be honest, she wasn't that much taller than her son, so Izuku might be on to something there with the growth-stunting warnings.

Hitoshi took a sip of his coffee.

His face spasmed.

His eyes widened.

He set the mug down, walked over to the sink and very calmly spat out the mouthful, leaning under the faucet to gargle the taste out of his mouth. He very, very carefully held back the scream and list of swear words he wanted to spit out with the last dregs of bitterness. He'd put in just as much milk and sugar as usual, what the SHIT was in that mix?

"Ah, 'morning, Shinsou-kun," Mrs. Midoriya said from behind him, halfway through a yawn. He nearly pulled something trying to yank himself away from the sink and say hello. Shit, had she heard him?

"Good… morning, Midoriya-san," he managed, trying not to make a face at the wretched taste still in his mouth. He'd been about to pour his coffee down the drain. Could he still do that, or would she be offended? Maybe if he found a houseplant she didn't like very much?

Without responding past a sweet smile and a nod, Mrs. Midoriya moved past him to start up the coffee machine again.

Was she… aware that it was broken? Should he tell her? But then she might think *he* broke it and tell him to never come over again and then maybe Izuku wouldn't be able to come to aikido anymore, which would suck, except then maybe if he *didn't* tell her and she found out anyway, he'd get in trouble for breaking the machine *and* lying about it? What exactly was the protocol on confessing your maybe-accidental sins to your friend's parent in the kitchen in your kitty pajamas at 7 a.m.?

Before he could warn, advise, confess or beg, Mrs. Midoriya filled her

mug, poured in half the sugar bowl, stirred in what looked like cinnamon and took a sip. He waited for the spit-take.

“Whoo! That’s a rush!” Mrs. Midoriya blinked wide a few times, then grinned. “Best way to start a morning.”

Hitoshi wasn’t sure if he was more impressed or unnerved, but he was definitely going to be more wary of her cooking if that’s what she thought coffee was supposed to taste like. No wonder Izuku never wanted to try his! He must have tried a sip of *this* shit, which was somewhere between ‘put hairs on your chest, boy’ and ‘radioactive swamp sludge.’

“Are you hungry, Shinsou-kun?” Mrs. Midoriya asked, already done with her coffee. She moved back to the machine. Hitoshi very very slowly slid away.

“I’m good!” His voice definitely had not been that high-pitched since he was ten. “I was just gonna… wait for Izuku… you know, plans.” He might have to bribe his friend to help him acquire coffee from the conbini but like hell was he going to ask for any from here.

“I see.” Her eyes looked suspiciously shiny. Oh, shit, what if she thought he didn’t like her cooking? If he made Izuku’s mom cry, was he automatically assigned to a special hell, or would he just die on the spot? “I just wanted to say,” she continued, “thank you.”

“Uh.” For possibly breaking her coffee machine?

“My Izuku has never had many friends, but he’s been so much happier since he met you. I’m glad I can see him smiling and excited to go to school again.” She wiped at one of her eyes, missing the way his face grew steadily redder.

“I, uh-- he started it?” he said, weakly. Was he supposed to say ‘you’re welcome?’ Or ‘thank you’ for, you know, raising Izuku to be his friend? Was that a weird thing to say to someone? None of this was covered in his ‘how to be a social person’ training!

Mrs. Midoriya covered her mouth, laughing quietly. Well, that was better than crying, even if it wasn’t all that kind on his ego. He absently raised his mug to have something to do with his hands and very quickly lowered it again. Not today, Chernobyl Coffee, not today.

“Have you been settling in well at Aldera?” She asked, pulling white bread from the fridge. “Toast?”

“Uh…” Which question was he supposed to answer first? “Yes and no. Thanks.”

She turned back to him, confused. Izuku did that same slight-pout-furrowed-brow combo whenever heroes on the news used their quirks illogically. Or whenever you gave him a compliment, but then he’d start sniffling and rubbing his eyes immediately, so it wasn’t quite the same.

“... So you do want toast?” Mrs. Midoriya asked, reaching back into the bread bag.

“N-” It was too late, she’d added it to the toaster. “Okay, thank you.” At least she hadn’t started saying he was too thin for a boy his age, like Grandma Yamada always did.

“Good. I worry, you know, Izuku’s never hungry in the morning either. But kids your age should be eating small meals all day to keep

up your energy." Well, close enough. "I heard from Mitsuki Bakugou that Kacchan has started eating two eggs and a protein shake every morning to build muscle. He always has so much energy, it's really admirable!"

"Sure. Admirable." Shit, he hadn't meant to say that out loud. Still, for his friend's mother to be praising his biggest bully like a favorite nephew…

"Hm?" She collected plates and began removing butter and jam from the fridge. Hitoshi resigned himself to eating two huge slices of toast as she placed his plate next to hers at the table. "You know Kacchan?"

"Unfortunately." He took the chance to 'spill' some (all) of his coffee in the sink as he went to wash his hands. "Whoops."

"Oh, I can make more--" Mrs. Midoriya got up from the table, reaching for his mug.

"NO!" He cleared his throat. "It's okay. I only wanted a little. Didn't want to… stunt… my… growth?" Man, could Izuku wake up and rescue him already? Breakfast conversations with adults who were coherent and verbal before their third cup of coffee was weirding him out.

"That's what Izuku always says. I think it broke his little heart when he figured out he'd never be as tall as All Might. Short just seems to run in the family." Mrs. Midoriya muffled her giggles with a bite of toast.

Hitoshi kind of had to laugh at that. Not that his friend's disappointed hopes were funny, it was just. Seven-foot-tall Midoriya? He'd either be the stringiest green bean you could imagine or… nah, pretty much

just string bean.

"I don't really know what runs in my family, but Aizawa says I'll probably hit six feet," Hitoshi confided. He'd already started his growth spurt, and they'd had to buy a heat pack to deal with the leg cramps that came with it. Yama-dad kept packing bananas in his lunch because potassium was supposed to help him grow. So far, all they'd helped grow was Hitoshi's aversion to bananas.

Mrs. Midoriya smiled at him. "From meeting Aizawa and Yamada-san, I think we can say that kindness runs in your family, Shinsou-kun."

Hitoshi looked down at his half-eaten toast, feeling his cheeks turning pink. "Thanks, Midoriya-san."

She sighed a little. "I sometimes wish… I could have-- Well. Izuku didn't really win the genetic lottery, did he? My poor boy."

Hitoshi felt his hands clenching under the table. Suddenly his throat felt like he'd swallowed a rock. "Don't say that."

Mrs. Midoriya blinked. "Hm?"

"He's not… someone you can pity. Izuku's amazing." His voice was raising, but Hitoshi barely noticed past the heat in his chest, the white-knuckled clench of his fists."He's not lacking because he doesn't have a quirk. Aldera's full of kids with strong quirks, but he's the only one brave and kind enough to be my friend. He always says you don't have to be special in order to save someone, and he's gonna use that to save a lot of people!" Mrs. Midoriya looked like he'd slapped her in the face. He was beyond caring. "Izuku has more strength and, and *admirable qualities* in his fricking... hair poof than Katsuki fucking Bakugou has in his entire body!"

Someone coughed behind him and Hitoshi's soul briefly left his body. He was standing, shouting across the table at Mrs. Midoriya (and yeah, fuck, maybe he'd just sworn at her *and* made her cry, shitshitshitshitshit) and he'd managed to wake Izuku up at just the wrong time. Could lightning come and strike him dead? Please?

"Shinsou-kun." Mrs. Midoriya's voice was cracking. "I'm… I'm sorry." She bowed deeply over the table and retreated from the room, pausing briefly in front of Izuku as if she wanted to give him a hug. Izuku reached out tentatively, and she clasped his hand, squeezing it tight before she fled. Hitoshi sank into his seat, avoiding Izuku's eyes. He could hear his friend's pre-tears sniffle already. Shittiest. Fucking. Morning. Ever.

Chapter End Notes

Hi all! We interrupted your regularly scheduled fluff for some angst. Hitoshi versus Mamadoriya: FIGHT.

(I wanted to write up until Hitoshi and Izuku's planned outing, but it kind of had to end here. Will update as soon as I can!)

Apologies

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Izuku heard everything.

Well, everything after his mom spilled the beans about that time when he was seven and started crying because no one in his family had ever approached six feet. Not that he actually knew what his biological grandparents looked like, since his mom had been adopted as a baby, but even his father was only about 5 foot 8. So Izuku was probably cursed to hit… maybe 5 foot 6 if he was lucky. And ate all his vegetables. Hitoshi was ALREADY 5 foot 7, well, 5 foot 8 if you counted his hair. It was seriously unfair.

Anyway, he'd been about to go in and start making oatmeal when Hitoshi had blown up at Mom. In a very Hitoshi, Must-Fight-Anyone-Who-Disparages-My-Friend-Even-A-Little kind of way. He hadn't really known how to react when his mom clasped his hand and excused herself from the room. She was probably, no, definitely going to crumple up and cry until she felt calm again, but he didn't want to try and follow her. Mom didn't like people seeing her cry when she got like this. Especially whenever she thought she wasn't being a good enough parent.

Izuku swallowed and walked into the kitchen, where Hitoshi was staring very hard at his half-eaten toast. He bit his lip, wondering whether he should sit next to his friend or stay standing, or… no, his mom definitely wanted to be alone, but maybe he should make some coffee for her and bring it in a couple minutes, when she'd had time to wash her face.

For once, there were no words fighting their way to his lips. He was genuinely… blank, of any reaction except that hatefully familiar burn of heat in his eyes.

“Didn’t mean to make you cry. Or your mom. Sorry.” Hitoshi said gruffly. He sat stiffly, like he was expecting Izuku to start shouting, or push him over, or something.

Izuku desperately wished he knew what to do. He couldn’t say thank you for sticking up for him, because it was his *mom* in the other room crying. But he also couldn’t get angry at his friend for, well, for saying he was amazing, in that angry passionate tone he used to say that anyone who hated cats was clearly related to Satan.

There just, weren’t any words. He reached a hand to Hitoshi’s shoulder, and was shocked when his friend got even stiffer, holding back a flinch. Shit. He swallowed, reached a little further, and tapped Hitoshi on the shoulder, a silent ‘Look at me.’ Reluctantly, silently, Hitoshi turned miserable eyes his way.

Pinching his right index finger and thumb in front of his eyes, he opened his hand and let it fall forward. *Sorry.* And, right pinky finger resting on the back of his left hand, he raised his right to chest height. *And thank you.*

Hitoshi’s eyes dropped. *Why ‘thank you?’ Your mom crying.*

Because. Izuku tried a small smile, wavering a bit. *Good friend.*

Hitoshi half-heartedly smiled back. *Why ‘sorry?’*

Because. Izuku took a deep breath. *I’m angry.*

At that, Hitoshi really did flinch back. Izuku bit his lip harder. He really, really hated the look on his friend's face-- half shocked, half resigned, like he should have known this was coming.

"M-m-" He tried. Shuddering breath in, shuddering out. He felt a little light-headed, and groped for the chair, pulling it out to take a seat. "M- *Mom* is-isn't bad. She l-, she l-l" He shook his head, raised his hands again. *Mom loves me.* Again, fingers shaking. *Mom* ***loves me*** **.**

"She was saying you--" Hitoshi stopped, eyebrows shooting up at Izuku's raised hand.

Mom loves me. You-- Izuku stared Hitoshi down, trying hard to keep his gaze serious but not too accusing-- *hurt her.*

"Only because she--" Hitoshi subsided again, frowning at Izuku's raised hand. "Can I finish a sentence?"

No. Izuku shook his head firmly. *You listen now.*

"Fine." Hitoshi folded his arms, sitting back defensively. "I'll shut up."

Izuku paused, hands stalling as he tried to figure out how to say, sign this. *If I,* he tried finger-spelling since he didn't know the word, *s-h-o-u-t at Aizawa, say he's a bad father. How you feel?*

"I--" Hitoshi looked, briefly, the way Mom had before she left. "I didn't say she was a bad mom."

You don't say, but she hear it. Izuku really hoped this made as much sense to Hitoshi as it did to him. *She think she t-e-r-r-i-b-l-e mom.*

"I didn't mean that! I just wanted her to stop saying that shit about you!" Hitoshi had pulled his chair back further, entirely out of arm-reach from Izuku now.

I know. Izuku sighed. How could he tell Hitoshi, in a way he'd understand, about those periods of his childhood when his mom would hug him close to her and apologize through her tears. And the times she could barely look at him without holding back a sob, so she would sit next to him and pat his hair while he worked on his notebooks, gazing fixedly at some other point on the wall.

How could he tell him about the days where she would take him out to picnics at different parks, to hero history museums and theme parks, racing him to different rides and taking thousands of pictures of his beaming face. The way she never asked him what went on at school, but made his favorites as often as she could, taped his favorite segments of news so he could re-watch them a million times even if she didn't understand how he never got bored with it.

And how she told him she was proud of him for every test score and report card, even when his grades fell because people stole his homework? Mom might not always say what he wanted to hear, but she had a million ways to tell him how much she loved him.

And that was enough.

What you say, not wrong. Words you say, too much, he settled for. Hitoshi just looked confused. Dammit. He opened his mouth and tried. "Y-y-you," he was honestly surprised his friend hadn't told him to just spit it out already. "You w-weren't wrong. To say she p- she p-pitied me. But she s-s-still loves me. A-and she's always h-here when I need

her. Tha-tha-that's more important. To me." He slumped forward slightly, completely out of words now.

"...Okay." Hitoshi had taken to looking down at his hands again. "I… said too much. I'm sorry."

Izuku smiled, more genuine this time. He kicked Hitoshi's chair leg gently and nodded towards the bedrooms.

"And I'll apologize to Mrs. Midoriya too. But not right now." Hitoshi took a deep breath and let it out, turning back to the table. "Could we just, I don't know, have breakfast?"

Izuku nodded, hair flopping into his eyes. *I make c-o-f-f-e-e?* He offered, tentative.

"NOPE, no, no, I'm good." Hitoshi grimaced. "Pretty sure that's where coffee goes to die."

Izuku cocked his head to the side. *C-o-f-f-e-e bad?*

"Dude." Hitoshi leveled Izuku a dead-serious look. "The shit from that machine probably counts as *grounds* for, I dunno, a charge of cruel and unusual punishment. Manslaughter of taste buds."

Izuku absolutely did not giggle. And if he did, it was only because Hitoshi no longer looked like a cat expecting a cold bath.

"I'm serious. Any more of that and I'd be really... depresso." Hitoshi

pulled a face at his own pun. “That sounded better in my head.”

Izuku nodded seriously, getting up to rummage through the cupboards. *Black tea okay?* He asked.

“Depends, does it taste anything like the coffee?”

No, tea tastes good. He pulled out the box to show Hitoshi. *I like it.*

“Alrighty.” Hitoshi had that I-just-made-an-awful-joke grin on his face now. Izuku raised an eyebrow at him. Obliging, Hitoshi raised his hands to spell it out. *A-l-r-i-g-h-t-e-a.*

Izuku grabbed the dish-towel and raised it threateningly. His friend’s laughter sounded less like amusement than relief, but it was enough for now. Izuku turned back to the kettle, hiding a smile as he set the coffee machine to make another cup.

“I *am* sorry,” Hitoshi said to his friend’s back. “Didn’t mean to make your mom feel bad. She’s… really nice.”

Izuku nodded.

“Do you think… there’s something I can do? To apologize?” Hitoshi might be aware he was begging, a little, but. This was Izuku’s mom. Even if he didn’t feel like shit for blowing up at her, he would have to fix this before Aizawa came to pick him up. Or there might never be another sleepover.

Izuku dumped the rest of the sugar bowl into the mug he stuck under the coffee drip, and placed tea bags in two mugs for Hitoshi and himself. Turning back to Hitoshi, he signed, *I have an idea.*

Sniffling, Inko splashed cold water on her aching eyes and patted her face dry. She should go back out and fix a lunch for the boys, especially if they were planning to go out.

But that awful twisting feeling in her stomach was back, that terrible dark feeling that whispered all her flaws in her ears. She *hated* that voice that laughed at her every effort to be there for Izuku, taunted her that she was never enough to shield her precious baby from the world. And worse, that it was all her fault, that her tiny ball of sunshine boy was stuck growing up in a world that wanted to snuff out every light he lit.

Still, Inko Midoriya refused to be a coward and hide in her room from a thirteen-year-old who had a *point*. Smacking her cheeks, she glared at her reflection, sniffed hard and turned around to head back to the kitchen and apologize. A lot. To Shinsou-kun and to her poor-- no, to her son.

Opening the door, she nearly stepped on a tray. A quick glance had tears brimming in her eyes. A bowl of oatmeal with raisins sprinkled in a smile-y face, that was all Izuku. A cup of coffee in her favorite chipped “Mighty Mom” mug. A small vase with, yes, that looked like a flower cut from the neighbor’s camellia bush. She’d have to scold them for that, even though half of the plant tended to encroach on her balcony. Stealing was not a heroic trait. The flower was beautiful, though.

As she knelt down to pick up the tray, she saw a small note written on

one of her cat-face post-it notes. “Sorry, Mrs. M. I got angry and overreacted. You’re really nice and a good great mom. --Hitoshi,” she read aloud to herself. “Oh, you sweet boys.” She laughed, watery but real. “Let me finish this coffee and then you are getting the hugs of your lives.”

Around the corner she heard a worried, “Hugs?” from Shinsou-kun.

“Y-you just wait, Mom’s hugs are the best,” Izuku whispered back.

“Well, yeah, I mean, she’s you but more mom-ly. Of course she gives good hugs.” Shinsou said it like it was fact. Inko couldn’t hold back her laughter anymore.

“Thank you, boys!” She called out. “I’ll be right out and we can eat together.”

Worried silence.

Shinsou, in a soft, horrified undertone. “... Do you think she heard me?”

Chapter End Notes

Sign language used in this chapter (well, some of it)

Thank you and Sorry: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQ8VWpZWg-Q

Angry: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybCpCOXcYwc

The boys give Mamadoriya a camellia mainly because I like camellias and there's a native Japanese species that's very pretty. White camellias mean "adoration and are given to someone that is well-liked" in Western(ish) flower language. In Japanese flower

language, they symbolize "humility, discretion and the perfect love" apparently. Thanks, Google.

Hope you like the chapter!

Childhood Friends

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Katsuki ran every day after school, but he reserved weekend mornings for the longer routes to test his endurance. Sometimes he got what the old hag would call “overambitious” and had to limp home on trembling legs, but he’d learned his lesson the second time he had to do physical therapy for an ankle sprain that hadn’t completely healed.

Now he took his time with stretching and warmups (in his room where he didn’t feel like a fucking pansy with people watching him), and he regularly made it up to four and a half miles before he started feeling like his legs would fall off.

Sometimes he’d listen to a rock playlist while he ran, but for the most part he liked to listen to the controlled hiss of his breath and the satisfying smack of his shoes against the ground. On good days, that smack sounded like a battle drum, *stronger, stronger, I’m getting stronger.*

On bad days, it sounded like a metronome slightly out of sync. *Not enough, not enough, not enough.* It was no big deal. Days like that helped him push harder, go further. You didn’t become number one hero by being satisfied with mediocrity.

Still.

Today was a bad day.

He was rounding a corner that took him past Auntie Inko’s apartment

block when he saw them. Deku and his new *pal*, that purple-haired troll-doll-looking fuck that kept mouthing off at him in school.

The little shits were huddled over a phone doing a counting game to decide something, he could hear them as he jogged closer. Deku in that sing-song tone going "*dore ni shiyou ka na, kamisama no iu toori, teppou utte ban ban ban, mou ichido ban ban ban, kaki no tane,"* like he used to when they were kids trying to decide which ice-cream to get from the vending machine. Deku always ended up getting mint chocolate chip, because he thought green things were healthier for you, the stupid fuck.

Purple-haired fuck-head (Katsuki knew his name, it was a stupid name, he'd made his own) was laughing and correcting him, "I learned it *Teppou utte ban ban ban, shinjatta*. My friend liked it best."

Deku opened his big fucking mouth and went, "Kacchan probably would have liked that too, violence was always--"

That was enough. He sped up, skidding to a stop in front of them with a growl. "WHAT were you saying about me, you little dweeb?" Deku gave that hitching gasp of horror he always did when he got scared. Pussy.

Purple-hair rolled his eyes. "Would you calm the fuck down? No need to go all Explodo-boy on us."

Deku had suggested hero names for him when they were three-- stupid shit like "Boom Boy" and "KaPow!" and… "Explodo Boy." He'd written them down in that stupid notebook in bubble letters next to Katsuki's suggested "Nerd Boy" and "Green Fucker." That shitty notebook was supposed to be buried in a backyard somewhere, not paraded around for every asshole who took pity on the quirkless brat. Katsuki stepped closer, leaning over the pathetic midget.

“WHAT THE FUCK HAVE YOU BEEN SAYING ABOUT ME, FUCKING DEKU?” He roared, bringing a hand up to the nerd’s face. The purple-head tried to grab his arm, but he smacked him away, furious.

“I-I-I di-di-di--” The nerd’s throat clicked in terror. Couldn’t even apologize if his life depended on it. Katsuki grabbed him by the shoulders and shoved him down-- not like he was gonna give the nerd a black eye right near Auntie Inko’s place. He’d stay down if he knew what was good for him.

“Keep my fucking name out of your stuttering mouth, shit-head,” he snarled, turning around to deal with the troll-doll. Of all the fucking days to find out Deku was still spewing that shit about their childhood memories to anyone who would listen.

“How about *you* keep your fucking hands off my friend? We didn’t do shit to you!” Purple Fuck retorted, trying to shove past him to where the nerd lay on the ground. Katsuki stuck out a foot to trip him and sneered down at the groaning pile they made.

“Fucking weaklings should know their place,” he growled, ready to storm off home and shower. “Next time I won’t be so nice.”

Deku grabbed at his friend when he tried to rise, doing some shit with his hands. Talking about him in sign? Fuckin’... “WHAT DID I JUST SAY?” he roared, turning back to kick at Deku’s quivering arms.

Purple surged up, grabbing his leg and pulling it higher while he kicked at his standing leg. Katsuki cursed as he went down, trying to kick himself free.

“You… are a grade-A nutcase! What the fuck!” Purple Fuck exclaimed. “Do I have to order you to leave us the fuck alone? Izu didn’t do shit!” Behind him, Deku was starting to tug on his shoulder, trying to drag them both away before Katsuki came back up to beat them into the ground.

“He doesn’t have to do shit, he’s DEKU!” Katsuki growled, ready to expound on all the irritating clinging nonsense he’d been forced to deal with since Auntie Inko and his old hag had started prenatal yoga together. All the goddamn pictures he’d been forced to sit next to the shit-nerd for *shichi-go-san*, the way their parents still cooed about how they’d bathed together and taken naps in matching pajamas, it made him want to barf just thinking about it.

But he couldn’t

Think

At all.

“Hi-Hi-Hicchan, pl-please,” Izuku whispered. “Le-let’s just, just go.”

Hitoshi’s shoulders were shaking under his hand, tense tremors of rage. He looked like he wanted nothing more than to punch Kacch-- Bakugou where the boy stood, hands steaming as the explosions ceased, eyes eerily blank.

“This is what he does all the time, isn’t it? Rags on you just for being there.” Hitoshi’s voice was unnaturally calm, measured. In a corner of

his mind, Izuku wondered that he was able to hold off on the effects of his quirk even as he maintained the hypnosis aspect. Depending on how long he was able to wait before giving the implanted “command” (and how close he needed to be to do it), his quirk was looking more and more perfect for infiltration and information gathering.

But if he was caught using it here, in a residential area with no unbiased witnesses to help claim self-defense, he could have a mark on his permanent record. It could severely affect his chances of being accepted to a hero school. Izuku pulled harder on his shoulder.

“Hicchan, STOP!” He shouted, desperate now. “We h-have to go!”

His friend’s eyes widened, and he hesitated before looking into Bakugou’s eyes. “**Stay here for five minutes.**” At Izuku’s questioning glance, he shrugged. “He’s on the sidewalk, he’ll be fine.”

Izuku dropped his grip to Hitoshi’s wrist and started pulling him to the nearest subway entrance. They’d been looking through cafés in the area, but with Bakugou on the warpath, Izuku wanted them out of the city for the day. He’d probably give Izuku the beating of his life the next time he found him alone, but that… was a worry for another day.

Izuku abruptly released Hitoshi’s arm as they started down the stairs. When they finally made it past the ticket machines and into the station proper, he risked a glance at his friend. “S-sorry. For pulling. A-and for y-y-yelling at you.”

Hitoshi glanced back, somber. “Sorry I scared you. I was just angry at him. I shouldn’t have--”

“Y-you didn’t scare me!” Izuku waved his arms frantically. “I-I knew

you wouldn't hurt him, and I was interested in how long you ca- can hold someone before y-you give them a command, but it wasn't-- you weren't-- I knew you wouldn't, and--"

"Breathe, Izu." Hitoshi was at least looking at him again.

"R-rules." Izuku gulped and tried to explain. "Schools are different from-- from public places. You c-could have gotten in trou- in trouble, so I wanted to--"

"... Oh." Hitoshi took a second to breathe in, shakily, and sigh. "That's what you were scared of?" He sat down on a bench, slumping against the backrest. Izuku perched next to him, gulped and nodded.

It wasn't a lie. Even if he found it a bit… odd to see Kacch--Bakugou, he had to call him Bakugou now-- frozen and still like that, his face lax instead of screwed-up in rage. Even if he still felt a pang of worry that his-- old friend? Acquaintance? Recurring nightmare?-- was standing dazed on a corner, in public where anything might happen. Even if he was worried about *that*, it wasn't Hitoshi's fault or anything. And he'd never be scared of Hitoshi for standing up for him, even if the other boy shouldn't have to.

"I-I'm sorry," he said again. "Y-you shouldn't have to, to defend me all the time." I should be able to stand up for myself, he meant. 'The first person a hero has to protect is themselves,' like Aizawa said.

"I don't *have to*," Hitoshi corrected. "I *want* to. There's a difference."

Izuku nodded. Remembering suddenly, he looked his friend over, top to bottom. "Are you o-okay? He tri- tripped you wh-when--"

Hitoshi took one look at his face and started snickering.

“Wh-what?”

“You’re not gonna like it,” Hitoshi warned, still stifling laughter. Izuku’s eyes widened, then narrowed.

“D-don’t you dare. I ju-just want one day wh-where we go to a café and n-no one makes terrible jokes,” he ordered. Hitoshi slid down the bench a little, getting out of arm’s reach. Preparing.

“Izu,” he said. “Guess what just happened.”

“No.”

“Izu, guess what Baka-gou just did.”

“ *No.* ” Izuku slid closer, arm at the ready.

“Izu, he made me *fall for y*-- ow, ow, ow, stop it!” Hitoshi batted away Izuku’s hands as they prodded him in the ribs.

“That joke was so bad, you h-have to be *punished,*” Izuku informed him, getting up as Hitoshi started to back away. His friend’s eyebrows raised.

“*Pun* -ished? Izu, I’m impressed. You may have… pun-tential.” At this, Izuku growled in frustration and debated kicking his friend in the

shin. Obviously shoulder-smacking and rib-poking were insufficient deterrents. “Please stop planning my murder, our train is here,” Hitoshi said, already heading to the line for one of the entrances.

“I-if I were planning to kill you, you wouldn’t see it coming,” Izuku muttered, following his friend. “Have we decided where we’re going yet?”

“Well….” Hitoshi slanted him a look. “Since we’re already headed out of Musutafu, and it’s a weekend… I figured we could stop by Yama-dad’s work for lunch.”

Izuku’s jaw dropped. “Y-Y-Yamada-san’s work?? You mean--” his voice cracked. He shifted to a whisper. “You mean *pro hero Present Mic’s r-r-radio show??”*

Hitoshi shifted closer to whisper back. “Yep.”

Izuku’s knees buckled. Hitoshi managed to grab him before he fell over as their car started to move.

“Holy shit, dude, I would have tried that earlier if I knew it would make you fall for me.”

Izuku retained enough presence of mind to realize that he should smack Hitoshi for that pun if he wanted to keep the negative reinforcement consistent. His remaining two brain cells were busy imagining what Pro Hero Present Mic’s workplace would be like. Would they have tons of merch? Was there a secret exit where Yamada could leave if he had to go fight a villain? What about the team that helped him decide which stories to talk about, would he get to meet any of them? He had so. Many. Questions!

“Izu, you’re literally vibrating and it’s starting to get worrying,” Hitoshi cautioned, watching his friend bounce on the balls of his feet at an alarming rate.

Izuku froze and turned to Hitoshi. “You’ve been to his work before? What’s it like? Is there a dress code? Can I meet some of the other talk show hosts? Do I need to sign anything? Howdotheydecidewhatnewstotalkaboutandwhatkindofmusictouse, doyouthinktheytranslatenewsfromothercountriesalotbecausetheytalkaboutint he took a deep breath, “--isitreallyokayformetocomewithyou???”

Hitoshi’s eyes were the widest he’d ever seen them. “Izu, how much caffeine did you have today?”

“Onlyalittle!” Izuku chirped, bouncing up and down again. He couldn’t stand still when he was about to see! Present Mic! In Action!! Sure, he’d met him as Hitoshi’s dad but STILL.

“I’m gonna text Yama-dad and let him know I’ve created a monster,” Hitoshi informed him, pulling out his phone. Izuku drooped slightly, pleading with his eyes to keep his friend from cancelling the trip. He’d never been in a hero’s workplace before, he couldn’t help if he got excited. And he’d only had three cups of tea because Hitoshi wanted to stay and make sure his mom didn’t have any hard feelings when they had breakfast!

“Jesus christ, now the puppy eyes?” Hitoshi shook his head. “If you ever weaponized those, they’d be lethal.”

Izuku widened his eyes a bit further, letting his lower lip push out a little. Mom had coached him on that face for whenever they were riding the bus and she wanted someone to give up their seat. It didn’t

work as well now that he wasn't six, but it was still somewhat effective.

Hitoshi tried to look away, but The Eyes got even wider, and slightly watery. He wasn't sure how Izuku managed to make his hair flop slightly into his face like that, but somehow he looked smaller, younger, and Just About To Cry in a way that was different from his usual Trying Not To Cry expression.

Hitoshi opened his text messages. He looked back into The Eyes and gulped.

Hitoshi closed his phone and put it away. To his relief, The Eyes blinked and Izuku smiled up at him, his normal beaming grin.

Thank you, he signed cheerily.

You're welcome, Hitoshi replied. "Just, warn me next time you bring those out, huh?"

Izuku tilted his head in confusion, but Hitoshi was on to him now. He'd stared into green wells of Disappointed Hope and Dashed Dreams. The Eyes had stared back.

He quietly hoped Aizawa was the next one to get hit, because his guardian was astonishingly weak against anything small and cute. There was a reason he had six cat siblings, after all.

Chapter End Notes

> Katsuki is SO HARD TO WRITE. I hope I did a good job for the beginning section, but he's just. hard to understand. Didn't want to make him a caricature of a grade school bully, but I also didn't

want to go the "secretly bullying Izuku for his own good" route, so this is what I ended up going with.

Hitoshi versus Katsuki: FIGHT.

Next chapter! Izuku at YamaDad's radio station!

Language notes: the counting thing they're doing is the Japanese version of Eenie Meenie Miney Mo. I think it's cool, so I kept it in the original language. (Plus if you look up the history, Eenie Meenie Miney Mo was pretty racist, so... didn't feel the need to write it in).

The version Izuku says translates to "Which one should I choose, I'll ask God (literally "as God decides/says"), Shoot a gun, bang bang bang, shoot one more time, bang bang bang, persimmon seed."

It's a version that's pretty commonly used in the Tokyo/Aichi regions. There are hella versions, I chose this one because the manga author's from Aichi and I've heard kids saying it before. Since Izuku and Katsuki are originally from ~ Shizuoka, I probably should have chosen a different version but shhhhhh just go with it.

The version Hitoshi uses ends in "Shoot a gun, bang bang bang, he died." Hitoshi's first friend found this version very amusing. Katsuki probably would have liked it too at that age.

Similarly, shichi-go-san is a sort of holiday to celebrate kids turning a certain age (three and seven for girls, five for boys, traditionally) where you put your kid in a cute kimono, take them to temple and take oodles of pictures. It's real cute. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shichi-Go-San

No, Izuku did not tell Hitoshi that Explodo-boy was one of their childhood hero names. Hitoshi's just unlucky like that.

Radio Killed the Video Star

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The last time Hizashi had seen a kid bounce that much, he'd been at a fair with his three-year-old cousin waiting in line for the port-a-potties. For all that he knew that Midoriya was a nearly-fourteen-year-old fueled mainly by excitement and wonder, a voice in the back of Hizashi's mind was still screaming "Show him to the bathrooms! Stat!"

He ignored the voice and grinned down at Hitoshi and his over-excitable friend. "Ready to take a tour, little listeners?"

"YES!" Midoriya cried, fist pumping in the air. Hitoshi smacked a hand to his forehead, probably to hide his snickers. Midoriya obviously couldn't care less, gazing around the lobby with starry eyes as he continued to bounce.

"That's what I like to hear!" Hizashi boomed, clapping a hand to each boy's shoulder and spinning them towards the front desk. "Let's get you your visitor passes and get this show on the road!" The receptionist, long used to exuberant behavior, handed Midoriya and Hitoshi name tags with an indulgent smile and offered them tea and coffee from the lounge.

Hitoshi, one eye on his vibrating friend, declined for both of them. "I think he's had enough for… the next week, at least. Any more and he'll be bouncing off the walls."

"Bouncing off walls would be a cool quirk!" Midoriya exclaimed, not at all bothered. "If you had enough maneuverability, you'd always be able to hit the villain where they don't expect it! Although it would take some practice to fight in three dimensions instead of two,

especiallyifyou'refastenoughtoactuallybounceofftheceilingaswellasthewallsw

"Aaaaand here we are at my office!" Hizashi cut in, gesturing both boys forward. Hitoshi immediately flopped down onto the oversized bean bag where he'd spent many a summer morning, riffling through Hizashi's shelf of Shounen Jump to see if there were any issues he hadn't read yet. Midoriya stepped in cautiously and then squeaked with what Hizashi assumed was joy. He rushed forward to the wall of pictures pinned up behind the desk, greedily devouring the board with his eyes. Hizashi usually took a picture with any guests on his show, unless they were anonymous or underground heroes.

"Th-th-that's Ingenium! A-and Best Jeanist! And--" Midoriya's voice failed him as his eyes fell on the one picture of All Might standing next to Hizashi, both beaming and doing the "peace" sign. The boy reached a trembling hand forward, barely breathing. "Y-y-y-you have a picture with ALL MIGHT?!"

Hizashi noted that Midoriya was able to reach a surprisingly high register for a teenage boy. Maybe he'd be interested in joining in during singing hour, since Hitoshi had all the music sense of a drunk meerkat.

"Yep," he affirmed. "He was on the show a few years back, as part of a fundraiser for some disaster relief program. He was worried some of the people he rescued wouldn't be able to afford a new place to live." He eyed Midoriya's wide-eyed expression and prepared to dig out his extra handkerchief if the waterworks started.

"Wh-what was he like?" Midoriya whispered reverently. Hizashi grinned, coming forward to clap the kid on the shoulder.

"Larger than life, kiddo. Larger than life."

Hitoshi snorted, star-fished on the bean bag. “His hair dented the doorframe to the recording room.”

“That too,” Hizashi confirmed. Midoriya turned to face both of them, eyes bright.

“C-can I see?”

There was no way in hell Hizashi could resist that face. “Sure, green bean. We have someone already there that I wanted you to meet, anyway.”

“S-someone you want me to meet? One of the other hosts?” Midoriya asked, bouncing on his heels again. “Is it the morning host? Or one of the tech staff?”

Hizashi chuckled, reaching a hand to Hitoshi to pull him out of his beanbag nest. “I guess you could say she’s a coworker. And a family friend.”

Hitoshi’s eyes widened. “*She’s* here? Are you…” he glanced at his friend and then back at Hizashi, “*absolutely* sure that’s a good idea?”

“Don’t worry, Toshi, she’s been warned.” He ruffled Hitoshi’s springy hair and guided the boys towards the recording room. “Besides, what’s the worst that could happen?”

Under the cover of Midoriya’s quiet muttering, he was sure he heard Hitoshi groan. Kids were so much fun!

Izuku hung back slightly as Yamada and Hitoshi entered the recording booth. He was a bit nervous about meeting *her*, whoever she was, but also. Well. The dent was there, right in the middle of the door frame. Right above his head. Where All Might's head had been.

While his friend's back was turned, Izuku stood on the tips of his toes and reached up.

....Nope, he was too short.

Well, nothing else for it.

He crouched slightly, then leaped up and managed to graze the top of the frame with his finger tips. It was like he'd jumped up and brushed against a star. He tucked his hand (never washing those fingertips again if he had his wish) against his chest and grinned.

Hitoshi, Yamada, and an unfamiliar woman in a knee-length sweater/dress were watching him. Yamada was grinning. Hitoshi was shaking his head, quirking a smile. The woman clasped both hands to her cheeks, delighted.

"That was *so cute!* " She squealed. "You didn't warn me he was *this cute*, Zashi!"

"There is no warning," Hitoshi responded gravely. "You have to see it to believe it."

Izuku faltered, looking between them all. “U-um…” Had he missed something? Like the introductions? “I-I’m I-Izuku Midoriya. Nice to, to meet you!” He bobbed a quick, nervous bow.

“I’m Nemuri Kayama. Feel free to call me Nemu, okay, cutie?” She grinned at him as she snaked an arm around Hitoshi, squishing him against her side. “This guy used to call me older sister, before he got ‘too old’ for it.” She rolled her eyes.

“I’m not the one too old for it,” Hitoshi muttered, then winced as his cheek was pinched. Kayama’s grin grew wider.

“Toshi forgets I babysat ‘im back when he was a tiny baby goth.”

“We didn’t meet until I was ten,” Hitoshi grumbled.

“He *forgets* I have *pictures,* ” Kayama continued, ignoring the way Hitoshi tried to squirm out of her grasp. “Easily accessible. On my phone. Of the first time he tried to do his own eyeliner.”

Hitoshi gave her the stink-eye. Kayama continued smiling at Izuku, who was torn between laughter and concern for his friend.

“I-I-If Hicchan doesn’t wa-want me to see it, I wo-won’t look,” he said, glancing nervously up to meet Kayama’s eyes. Hitoshi nodded at him in gratitude. “E-e-even if it’s *really* funny. S-s-sorry.”

At that, Kayama cracked up in laughter, letting Hitoshi go as she doubled over and slapped her knee. Hitoshi slunk behind Yamada and

over to Izuku's side, rubbing the redness away from his pinched cheek.

"Thanks for your support," he commented drily as they watched Kayama devolve into giggles.

"Welcome," Izuku murmured back. Yamada, meanwhile, was lending a shoulder as Kayama straightened up, still chuckling.

"Ahhhh, that's what I like to hear," she proclaimed. "Good on you, kid, for setting boundaries like that."

Izuku stared up at her. "...Huh?"

"You let me know you were uncomfortable and refused something because you value your friend. Good on you." Her voice turned unexpectedly serious. "It's like I always tell my students-- if I say or do anything that makes you uncomfortable, lemme know so I know your boundaries. And if another adult does or says anything that makes you uncomfortable, lemme know so I can kick the shit out of 'em."

Hitoshi was expecting the Izuku Eep of Surprise™ for hearing a swear word. He wasn't expecting his friend to literally jump in place like a startled bunny.

"Y-y-you're Pro Hero Midnight!!" He shouted. Then he clamped his hand over his mouth with a squeak.

Yamada had stepped back and started quietly filming. He'd just won a bet against Shouta, after all.

Kayama's eyes widened, before she grinned again, the sharp, nearly feral grin of the R-rated Hero. "How'd you know?"

"I-I-I heard an interview. W-well, Mom wouldn't let me lis-, um listen to your interviews for a while, b-because she said I'd learn new words? A-and I was too young. But when y-you gave a speech about, um, about costumes for heroes a-and the different needs of people w-with skin-based emitter quirks, y-you said that any, um, anyone who looked at a minor wearing a ne-necessary costume and s-sexualised them deserved to have the…" he trailed off, shooting Hitoshi a helpless look. His ever-so-helpful friend smirked and waved a hand, urging him to go on. "...the shit kicked out of, out of them," he whispered. Yamada smothered a laugh, stopping the video to hit send. Shouta would get a kick out of it, he was sure.

"You heard that one, huh? Yeah, that was before the censors really started whinging. You threaten to castrate one-- a couple-- okay, you threaten to castrate literally everyone who touches a minor or another person in a way they don't consent to, and suddenly you're 'R-rated' and 'not fit for children's television.'" Kayama's air quotes were accompanied by a generous eye roll.

Yamada coughed. "Coulda been the costume too, Nemu."

Kayama raised an eyebrow. "Got a problem with leather now, Cockatoo?"

Izuku spluttered out a surprised laugh, imagining a parrot in Present Mic's leather pants and jacket. Hitoshi shook his head in resignation.

"Yama-dad, we're hungry. The costume argument can wait until the restaurant."

Kayama spun to face them. “Food?”

“We were going to get sushi, right Toshi?” Yamada asked, looking grateful for the save.

“If Izu’s okay with it,” Hitoshi shrugged.

Kayama’s intense stare switched from Hitoshi to Izuku. The latter curled back into himself and hesitantly nodded.

“Great!” Kayama cheered, punching a fist to the sky. “Zashi, you’re treating!” Her sweater hiked up slightly, showing off the disney pajama shorts she was wearing underneath. Izuku blushed effervescently and looked away until she settled down.

“Why is it always my treat,” Yamada sighed, gesturing for Izuku and Hitoshi to precede them.

“Because wage gap,” Kayama said bluntly.

“We work at the same place. It has the same pay,” Yamada pointed out, fruitlessly.

“And you have three jobs. Checkmate,” Kayama replied, unconcerned.

“You just want to save for another spa trip,” Yamada accused. Hitoshi and Izuku, walking slowly, exchanged a speaking glance. On Hitoshi’s side, it said ‘not this shit again.’ On Izuku’s, it was more like, ‘pro heroes! Two pros! Eating lunch with pro heroes Present Mic and

Midnight!!’

Hitoshi sighed. Lunch would be… interesting. At least Yamada had promised they could go to a cat cafe after as a treat.

Chapter End Notes

The title is taken from "Video Killed the Radio Star." No real relation to the content, but I listened to the song for a bit while writing. Because who knows what radio stations are like? Not me...

Yep, Izuku has now met three fourths of the Present Mic, Eraserhead, Midnight, Ingenium quartet! I write Midnight a bit differently from the show, I think, mainly because... no matter how much she is okay w being sexualised by the media, I don't see her as being the type to make younger ppl uncomfortable. Instead, I see her as someone who would for sure call out any hero agency that takes advantage of rookie heroes, and especially anyone who sexually harasses ppl. In v profanity-laced detail. Ergo, her R-rating.

Cats of a Feather (Flock Together)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The thing about languages was, you couldn't choose your first. Mother tongue, native tongue, first language, whatever you called it, it was the mixture of sounds and meaning you pick up from what you hear as an infant and turn into a means of communication.

His mother was half-Korean half-Japanese and had tried to speak both to him as a child so he'd grow up bilingual. His father, not to be outdone, had countered with Japanese and English whenever he returned home from the veterinarian office, picking up his tiny son with gentle hands and cooing.

Both of their efforts, however, were in vain.

Kouji Kouda's first language was Cat.

His mother, whose Quirk allowed her to copy a voice and accent after hearing it once, was confused when her baby insisted on meowing at her whenever he was hungry. His father, whose Quirk let him understand how animals felt by touching them, took copious videos and found it hilarious.

The kids in his daycare were less understanding. When they weren't teasing him about his looks (too pink, too block-like, didn't he look *dumb as a rock* they giggled), they laughed at him for the way his sentences would lapse into hisses, how his words meandered downwards and upwards tonally the way Marshmallow Kitty had taught him.

By the age of six, Kouji communicated mainly through written notes and sign language.

Animals, though. He loved them, loved the way they perked up as soon as he drew near, tails wagging, eyes wide and loving, **yes, you hear me, you know me, trust you trust you love you.** If only they could understand his hands instead of his voice, Kouji would have been perfectly happy. Who needed human friends, after all, when he could sit in a pile of puppies behind his father's desk, assuring them all in whispers that **yes, their teeth were fierce and sharp, their fur was thick and soft, they would grow up strong and beautiful and loved.** When he could scratch the crests of the parrots and let them dance across his shoulders to the songs they selected, crowing out what lyrics they knew to make him laugh. When he could whistle at the sparrows on his way to school and have them waiting on his way back for the crumbs he scattered by the sidewalk, telling him earnestly of the crows encroaching on their territory and that one of them! Had seen a cat! But flown away in time!

Who needed human friends.

Still, he sometimes wished he could have… support. Back-up for when he visited shelters and pet cafes on the weekend to make sure everyone was happy and healthy. Then maybe he wouldn't be stuck trying to write out a respectful message to this cafe owner that Pumpkin actually didn't like her name or all the grabby-hand humans that came to play, and that she especially didn't like when the cafe owner brought her son to work on weekends and the little boy tried to grab her tail with his sticky hands.

As it was, the woman barely glanced at the note before telling him he had another half hour unless he wanted to pay for more time.

Kouji suppressed a growl and raised his hands fruitlessly. *Please listen to me, read the note*, he signed, pointing again at what he'd written.

“E-excuse me,” a soft voice interjected. Kouji turned to see a green-haired boy approaching, one of a small party that had arrived while he’d been listening to Pumpkin. He wouldn’t have noticed, except that the boy had been sneezing forcefully until his friend gave him allergy medicine.

Turning to him, the green-haired boy smiled tremulously and gestured, *Nice to meet you. Can I help?*

Kouji wasn’t sure exactly what it was about that smile, the helping hands speaking his language, but for a moment he was unable to contain the hope welling within his chest, the wonder that this boy might be like him.

Nice to meet you! Thank you so much! Can you tell her to please read the note? It’s important!, he responded, pointing again at the cafe owner and the note.

The other boy’s eyes widened but his smile didn’t falter. *You want… her to read… that?*, he responded, hands slow and uncertain. *Sorry, you sign fast and I’m learning.*

Kouji deflated a little at that, disappointment bitter in the back of his throat. *Yes, you’re right,* he answered. At least the boy knew enough that he could help with the owner.

“O-okay. Um.” The boy looked at the cafe owner, who was beginning to frown at them both. “Miss, he just wants you to read that note. I. Um. Know a bit of sign? I can try to help translate i- if that’s, um, if that’s okay?” He looked between Kouji and the woman uncertainly, shrinking back a little. “U-um, not to say that you c-can’t communicate! I mean, there’s the note. But, well, I’m here a-and it

seemed like you might want a little, um, help?" He was looking at Kouji now, eyes as wide and dark and sincere as the two-week old puppies his father had let him help raise when their mother got sick. Kouji… had no way to deny that look.

He nodded, somewhat warmed by the way the other boy's eyes widened further as he relaxed slightly and grinned back.

The cafe owner finished reading the note and sighed. "Is this a Quirk thing? Because all of our cats are trained to be friendly to visitors. I haven't noticed any issues with Pumpkin or the others."

Kouji frowned. Of course she hadn't noticed, she barely glanced at the cats as she went around to deliver food and drinks to the customers. Why on earth someone would want to run a cat cafe when they didn't care about cats was a mystery to him.

The other boy looked at him, cocking his head to the side in question.

Kouji sighed. *Pumpkin said she can't see well out of her left eye. She hates it when people walk in her blind spot and your son keeps running over and grabbing her when she can't get away.*

The boy gulped slightly but nodded to him. "He says that… Pumpkin? Has a problem with her left eye. She doesn't like… people? When she can't see. And, um, something about your son?"

That wasn't a bad translation, actually. *He grabs,* Kouji signed, gesturing large to make it clear. The boy grinned at him, signing a quick *thank you!*

“He grabs her. She doesn’t like it,” the boy added, standing a little straighter as Kouji nodded at him.

The owner sighed. “Look, kids, I understand you want to help… but ultimately this is a business. I can’t just not take my son here or keep people from walking around because one cat has a problem. My hands are tied here.” She pointed at a sign behind the counter. “If you feel that strongly, these are all shelter cats. They’re up for adoption.”

Kouji drooped slightly. He wasn’t allowed any more pets, and the kennels at his dad’s office were already full. The other boy looked at him apologetically. “I… I don’t think I can. My mom is allergic too, s-so…” *I’m really sorry,* he signed.

The tall purple-haired kid who’d arrived with the nice green boy chose that moment to walk up. “What’s going on, Izu?” he drawled, slouching an elbow on the shorter boy’s shoulder.

“Oh! U-um. Th-this is—“ ‘Izu’ stuttered to a stop. *Sorry!* He signed, *What’s your name? I’m Izuku Midoriya.*

Kouji Kouda, he responded. *Nice to meet you.*

I’m Hitoshi Shinsou, Midoriya’s friend answered, pulling back upright to free up his hands. *What’s going on?*

Midoriya elbowed Shinsou in the ribs, gently. *You say Nice to meet you,* he reminded, frowning.

Nice to meet you. What’s going on? Shinsou corrected. Kouda looked between them, somewhat surprised. Midoriya didn’t really seem like

the type to be friends with this blunt, laid-back stranger, but then, he didn't really seem the type to run in to help when he saw someone using JSL, either.

Kouji pointed at Midoriya, who looked confused for a moment. He smiled and gestured, *talk*. It would be faster than trying to sign the whole thing out again, and he had no idea how much Shinsou would understand.

"O-oh! Um." Midoriya took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "K-Kouda was asking the owner, um, telling her that one of the cats is unhappy? She, um, she can't see with her left eye, so, um, so she doesn't like strangers grabbing her o-or the owner's son."

Sticky hands, Kouji explained with a grimace. Shinsou grimaced back in understanding.

"A-and the owner said she can't help? But, um, but all the cats are up for adoption? Kouda can't though, and I-I'm allergic, so--" Midoriya wilted slightly.

Shinsou squinted thoughtfully, then pulled his phone from his pocket. "I have an idea. But for it to work, you both have to do exactly what I say."

Midoriya and Kouji exchanged a glance, but nodded back.

For Pumpkin, Kouji said.

For Pumpkin, Midoriya agreed.

Shinsou grinned, slow and evil.

Shouta was on his lunch break (nap, his nap time, yes, yes, he *knows,* Snipe, stop snickering. Damn weekend meetings.) when his phone buzzed. The attachment came from Sleepy Kid. Shouta opened one eye to see the contact photo (his son, twelve years old, fast asleep in a puddle of cats) and sighed.

The video loaded.

Midoriya sat next to a pink-headed kid he didn't know, holding an orange cat. If this was another kitten sneeze video, he was going to save it until after his nap.

"U-um! A-Aizawa-san! S-s-sorry to bother you at work, but um, this is Pumpkin." The pink-headed boy lifted the orange cat slightly, and she started purring and rubbing her head against his cheek. Cute. "She, um, lives at a cat café but she's not happy here. Kouda-kun's Q-q-Quirk is Animal Whisper (so cool!), so she, um, told him she's blind in one eye and doesn't like all the people--" Relatable. "--but she's, um, up for adoption! A-and Kouda-kun's family can't and, um, m-my mom is allergic, so--"

Hitoshi, holding the camera, whispered, "Do the face!"

Midoriya sputtered, but steeled himself and peered imploringly up at the camera. His eyes were wide and watery. His lower lip trembled. His floof of hair quivered sadly.

Actually, that was probably the camera shaking as Hitoshi tried not to laugh.

The pink kid next to him turned Pumpkin around so that she looked at the camera and gave a tiny chirp.

Aizawa turned off his phone and dropped it on the couch.

Goddammit.

“... We’re getting another cat,” he grumbled, collapsing back on his side and covering his face with one arm. Not even the other underground heroes walking quietly by would be able to see the huge grin spreading across his face. Those damn manipulative kids.

He was so proud.

Chapter End Notes

> Okay, so, I realized last week that you can't have a JSL Midoriya story without Kouda, and was trying to figure out how they meet and then this happened. It's never really explained why Kouda prefers sign over talking, so at first I was like "he probably got teased about his voice" and then I had the idea that his first language was Cat and it grew from there. I hope you enjoy the latest chapter, and thank you again for reading!

A Pumpkin By Any Other Name

Chapter Notes

> So for this chapter, italics mean sign language and *italics* are animals talking. This chapter just really wanted to happen, so you get two updates in two days. (Please don't expect all updates this quick, it takes anywhere between a few days and over a week usually). Kouji, Izuku and Hitoshi's continuing cat café adventures, please enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hitoshi turned off his phone with an air of satisfaction. “And now, we wait,” he declared, joining Izuku and Kouji on the floor. He offered his hand to Pumpkin for a sniff, waiting until she butted her head against his knuckles to stroke behind her ears and under her chin.

You think this will work? Kouji asked. *I don’t want to get her hopes up.*

Don’t worry, Hitoshi responded. *My dad loves cats.*

Izuku nodded fiercely. Aizawa wasn’t really the type you’d expect to have a soft spot for, well, anything, but he definitely caved the instant one of his cats wanted to be picked up and petted. Izuku had stopped being startled by it the third time Hitoshi sent him a picture of his guardian asleep on the floor with cats strewn all over his sleeping bag. One of them had been asleep in his hair in the last one.

“S-so when d-do you think you can take Pumpkin home?” he asked, looking past Hitoshi to where Yamada and Pro Hero Midnight Kayama were arguing over whose costume was better. They’d been arguing for… nearly half an hour now and showed no signs of stopping. It was actually kind of impressive.

“Probably Monday or Tuesday, Aizawa won’t be home until then--” Hitoshi stopped, turning to Kouji. *Sorry, I said we could a-d-o-p-t her Monday or Tuesday.*

Kouji smiled wryly. *It’s okay. I can hear.* He waited for the usual question. ‘Why don’t you talk if you can hear like a normal person?’ He always wanted to answer, ‘Because I don’t talk like a normal person, obviously.’

“Oh!” said Izuku. “That’s cool! I-I mean not that it wouldn’t be cool if you c-couldn’t hear? But, um, I’m not good at sign yet, so it’s sort of a relief-- I mean-- Um.” He fell silent, hoping Kouji hadn’t heard the words over the sound of his foot in his mouth.

Hitoshi smiled, reaching over to pat Izuku on the shoulder. “Okay, phew, cuz I realized I’ve only been signing like half of what I said.”

Izuku jolted slightly as Pumpkin meowed loudly-- an affronted accusation that Kouda had **stopped petting her why would he do that her fur was soft and amazing keep petting now.**

Kouji laughed and obeyed, signing *Sorry* with his off hand out of habit.

“D-do animals understand sign?” Izuku asked, leaning forward with curiosity. Hitoshi snickered, patting his friend on the head as he walked back to their table to retrieve his iced coffee.

Kouji shook his head sadly. *Only my voice,* he answered.

“Th-th-that’s so…” here it comes, Kouji thought glumly. “...cool!”

He looked up. Izuku had shot to his feet in his excitement, fists clenched. He looked like he would start bouncing any minute.

“C-can you talk to any animal? O-or only mammals? Vertebrates? Do you h-hear them in Japanese o-or is it more like impressions? Isitonlyspeechtheyunderstandorcanyousingatthemtoo, becauseIkeepaskingHicchanifhisquirkworksbysingingandhehasn’tansweredbu
Izuku’s face was split in an incredulous grin.
“That’ssuchagreatquirkforahero!”

Kouji was gaping now, he was pretty sure. Izuku was still bouncing on the balls of his feet, but his voice had faded into a low mutter, and Kouji was pretty sure he was currently debating whether Animal Whisper would work over a microphone system and how it could be used for reconnaissance and search and rescue missions.

Hitoshi sidled back up to them and slumped down next to Kouji, taking a deep gulp of coffee.

“He gets like that, don’t worry,” he murmured to Kouji. “If you wanna know what he’s saying, ask to see his notebook in a bit.”

Kouji nodded dumbly. *He said I could be a hero,* he signed, halfway to himself. No one but his parents had ever told him that.

Hitoshi smirked, not unkindly. *We are going to be heroes. If we can, you can.*

Izuku seemed to notice that he’d been talking too fast and covered his mouth, turning red. He sat back down, gingerly. *Sorry, I talk too much,* he apologized.

Kouji shook his head. *Thank you*, he answered. *I want to be a hero, too* .

From the way Izuku and Hitoshi both grinned at him, he'd said exactly the right thing.

By the time Yamada walked over, they were trying out different names for Pumpkin, who absolutely rejected anything Hitoshi suggested.

To be fair, he'd started out with "Zucchini" and followed up with every other kind of squash he knew.

Izuku, on the other hand, was campaigning hard for her to be named Mandalay, Pixie Bob, Ragdoll or Tiger.

Kouji was bemused. *Those are all different breeds of cat? She is a tabby cat*, he pointed out.

"B-But they're heroes! The Wild, Wild Pussycats!" Izuku curled his hands into paws, "Y-you know, 'Lock on with these sparkling gazes! We've come to lend a paw and help! Coming out of nowhere… Stingingly cute and catlike! Wild, Wild Pussycats!!" He punched a 'paw' to the sky.

Hitoshi lost the battle with his giggles and fell on his side, laughing. He just barely managed to save his coffee from the fall, setting it safely to the side. Kouji at least managed to curl over Currently-

Unnamed-Kitty as he shook with laughter.

Yamada, behind Izuku, could only shake his head. Aizawa would be sad he had missed lunch today.

“So what’s this I hear about our new kitty? Who’s lucky number seven?” he asked, hands in his pockets. Kayama had followed, plate of cheesecake in hand.

Izuku dropped his hands, blushing. “U-um. Seven? Oh!” He turned back to Kouji. “We could name her Nana!”

“Izuku Fluffles Midoriya,” Hitoshi intoned from the floor. (“--’s not my middle name,” Izuku muttered.) “Did you. Just suggest. We name our seventh cat SEVEN?”

“H-hey! Mom likes that name! I-if I was a girl she would have named me Nana,” Izuku defended. He stretched out his foot and poked Hitoshi in the side, warningly. Hitoshi rolled away, onto his back. From behind him, a curious brown kitten stalked forward, aiming at his rumpled hair.

“I like it.” Hitoshi declared. “What does her majesty think?” He winced as the kitten batted at his hair, catching some of it in her claws. Luckily, she retracted her claws before he sat up, although Kouji thought he heard a disappointed **awwww** from her direction.

Kouji looked between his two new-- acquaintances? Friends? *One moment,* he signed, bending over Not-Pumpkin’s purring form to whisper in her ear.

Possibly-Nana took a moment to uncurl, languidly stretching her back. She flicked her tail idly from side to side before stepping gingerly out of Kouji's lap and walking over to Izuku, brushing against Hitoshi's knees on her way. With a brisk leap, she settled on top of Izuku's knees and purred.

She likes it, Kouji signed, grinning.

"Yes!" Izuku grinned, reaching down to smooth his hand along Nana's fur. "Nice to meet you, Nana!"

Yamada grinned as Kayama leaned against his shoulder munching on the last of her cheesecake. "Guess I'll call Shouta with the news. Don't adopt any more cats before I get back, okay?"

Kayama ducked down to give Nana a rub behind the ears, then headed to the counter to return her plate. It was possible she would get another slice of cheesecake on her way, since she'd already eaten two. 'Calories eaten with friends don't count,' she'd said when she ordered the first one.

Thank you both, Kouji said. *Thank you so much.*

"Hey, what are heroes for?" Hitoshi said, grinning down at the brown kitten trying to climb his shirt to reach **purple fluffy toy mineminemine.** "Saving the world one kitty at a time."

"A-aizawa won't let you a-adopt all the cats," Izuku reminded him. Hitoshi lazily waved a hand.

"Keep it up with the face, we'll have our own cat café in a week," he

assured his friend, who pouted in return.

Kouji started laughing as Nana began kneading at Izuku's leg, claws flexing and relaxing.

She says her pillow keeps moving, he explained. *You can take over the café? Is that your quirk?* He pointed to Izuku. *P-e-r-s-u-a-s-i-o-n or something?*

"Ah. Um. That's kind of…" Izuku glanced at Hitoshi, a 'do you want to tell him' look.

"That's my Quirk. Brain-washing." His voice was flat. "I can't use it on you, don't worry." Kouji shrugged at him and watched as the other boy's shoulders relaxed slightly.

"Y-y-your Quirks are actually really similar, though!" Izuku added, high-voiced with worry. "I-I-It's almost like Hi-Hicchan has People Whisker, I mean whisper, if, if you, um, think about it."

Hitoshi raised an eyebrow. "That's the second pun you've made in the last ten minutes. Izu, are you feeling well?"

Kouji nodded at Hitoshi. *Your quirk is pretty cool, then. And you, Midoriya?*

Izuku looked down at Nana, biting his lip. *I don't have one*, he answered. For some reason, it was easier if he wasn't speaking. Saying "don't have one" instead of "Quirkless." Like he was talking about the latest hero action figure instead of the power everyone else had and he was born without.

Kouji waited until Izuku met his eyes. *Okay,* he signed.

"Okay?" Hitoshi asked incredulously. "Just 'okay?'"

Kouji shrugged. *I have Animal Whisper voice power and I don't speak. He has no quirk. Together, we saved Nana. Save the world one cat at a time.*

Izuku's eyes widened, prickled with tears. "Y-y-you really mean it?"

Kouji smiled and nodded. *If I can be a hero, you can, too,* he affirmed.

Hitoshi appeared to have lost a step, expecting an argument that had fizzled out before it started. He stared between Kouji and Izuku, who had started sniffling back tears as his face split in a wide, sunshine grin. Grumbling slightly, he dislodged the kitten from his shirt and fumbled for his handkerchief.

"Izuku has raved over your quirk, you've made him cry happy tears, and you helped me get a new cat. We're friends now," he explained to Kouji, who had started looking distressed at Izuku's waterworks. "Don't worry, crying is just a way to let out emotions. It's like an emotional sneeze."

As expected, this led to Izuku's one-handed attempts to whack at his shoulder. He was fortunately hampered by Nana's disgruntled attempts to **keep soft pillow still nap time stop stop stop moving.**

Helplessly, Kouji started to giggle breathlessly, attracting the rest of the cats from the corners of the room. By the time the owner realized

they were monopolizing the entertainment, Hitoshi was star-fished cackling on his back with a cat on each limb, Kouji was whispering encouragements to the kitty army from the side, and Nana had decided that her **pillow face leaking stop stop stop** and was grooming Izuku's hair with a rough tongue, paws placed on his shoulders to keep him from squirming away. Kayama, next to Kouji, had a lap full of Maine Coon cat and was trying to get the best photo possible of her model's fluffy tummy while holding cheesecake out of reach of a curious tabby with her other hand.

Yamada returned from his phone-call, grinned, and took another video. Yeah, Shouta was definitely coming with the next time they went to a cat café.

Chapter End Notes

I have gotten a few comments about Nana's name (which is awesome, this is exactly what I wanted). Yes, Nana can mean seven-- or more accurately, 'seven' can be written/pronounced as either 'nana' or 'shichi.' Depends on the context, but for the most part 'nana' is more common. Yes, Horikoshi was very imaginative in naming the seventh OFA user 'Nana.'

It is a kind of common name in Japan, though, and the name itself does not mean seven. "From Japanese 菜 (na) meaning "vegetables, greens" and/or 奈 (na), a phonetic character. The characters can be in either order or the same character can be duplicated, as indicated by the symbol 々. Other kanji with the same pronunciations can also be used to form this name." says BehindTheName.com

Yes, Nana Shimura's name is written with both characters, starting with the character for "vegetables, greens." (Remind you of any other characters' names??)

Thank you so much for reading and commenting! I'm glad this story has reached so many people, and it's amazing to read your reactions. Thank you for reading!!!

Consequences

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Okay, boys, have a great day! Izu-kun, let Aizawa-san know I might not be home when you finish your aikido lesson, okay? You have your key and there’s miso soup and leftover curry in the fridge, okay? Don’t wait for me if you get hungry for dinner--” Inko bustled around the kitchen, straightening her cardigan around her shoulders, washing her breakfast dishes and searching for her coffee thermos. “Izu-kun, do you know where my--?”

“I think it’s on the counter, Midoriya-san,” Hitoshi said, scooping his last bite of oatmeal from the bowl. “Sugar bowl’s empty, though.” He and Izuku had found a recipe for microwave-able mug cakes the night before and tried it out. They ended up with somewhat goopy chocolate messes, but it had still tasted good. He might give Aunt Nemu the recipe so she could make them at work, she always complained that there wasn’t enough chocolate in the teacher’s lounge.

“Oh, we have a refill… where was it?” Inko raised a hand and ‘pulled’ gently, opening the taller cabinets one by one.

“Spice cabinet, top shelf,” Izuku pointed out, covering his mouth as he chewed.

“Thank you, sweetie!” With slow, controlled movements, Inko ‘beckoned’ the bag of sugar forward, floating it down into her arms. Setting it on the counter, she pinched both hands in the air above the bag and ‘pulled’ slowly to tear it open. Izuku clapped as the bag wobbled slightly but opened with no spills.

Inko ‘pulled’ the sugar bowl, sliding it across the counter to rest at her elbow, lifted the bag and poured until it was full.

“This is my favorite part,” Izuku whispered to Hitoshi.

Without looking, Inko reached over her shoulder and used her quirk to open the top drawer of her desk. A ball of elastic bands sprang forward, launching itself straight into her waiting hand. With aplomb, Inko removed a band, twisted the bag of sugar closed and set it next to the coffee machine.

As she turned around, Izuku and Hitoshi gave her a standing ovation. Grinning, Inko took a bow, left hand over her chest.

“Thank you, thank you--” she looked down, catching a glimpse of the time, “oh no.”

Much more quickly, she stirred sugar and cinnamon into her piping hot thermos, closed the lid, ‘pulled’ her bag from the hallway, and bustled around the table to give Izuku a smacking kiss on the forehead and Hitoshi a quick hug around the shoulders.

“Have fun at school, be good, and kick some butt at your lessons, okay dears?” she called over her shoulder, pulling the door open and yanking it closed behind her.

Hitoshi stretched his arms over his head, yawned massively and stood up to bring his and Izuku’s bowls to the sink. “Your mom is cool.”

“Mm-hm!” Izuku affirmed, chugging the last of his tea. He wiped his mouth and brought his mug up to wash. “She didn’t, um, didn’t used

to use her quirk around me? I th-think she thought it would make me sad, or, um, jealous? But Aizawa said I should, should take every opportunity to analyze quirks and see if I'm correct."

"I remember," Hitoshi answered, frowning. Aizawa had been trying to get Hitoshi to demonstrate his own quirk, which was not happening. He hated using it on people he liked. Stopping bullies was fine, but seeing that blank, glazed look on the face of a friend (watching it fade into shock and fear and disgust)… the thought turned his stomach.

"So! Um," Izuku glanced at him apologetically and went on. "So I asked if she could demonstrate? And we figured out that even though Mom's quirk only works to pull small objects, she can, can pull from any direction towards herself, even if she can't see it. And if it's close enough, she can pull one object multiple ways to get it to open. Or, um, break, I guess." He rubbed the back of his head nervously. Mom had basically… exploded the tennis ball they'd been practicing with when they figured that use out. She must have been practicing a lot to make the sugar open so slowly. "I-It's really cool! The next test is if she can pull a part of a larger object, or if it only works on complete objects. I think if, if she can figure out how to pull something past her and aim, it would, um, be really good for self-defense! She can 'pull' things really fast sometimes, it could leave serious bruises!" Although, actually, it might be more effective with something like bits of gravel or shards of glass, if she could 'pull' multiples at once. It would effectively be a kind of scattered shrapnel attack.

"Your brain is a scary place sometimes," Hitoshi stated, cutting off Izuku's thoughtful muttering. "Brilliant, but scary."

"Um." He had no idea how to respond to that. "Th-thank you?"

"You're welcome. Now brush your teeth and let's get going," Hitoshi ordered, shrugging on his school jacket. His duffel bag was all packed in Izuku's room, so he planned to leave it there until Aizawa drove Izuku home from their lesson. "Remember, we're going tomorrow

after school to pick up Nana."

"R-right!" Izuku grinned and bounded to the bathroom, already excited for the next day. Kouda had texted them to say he could come meet them to translate for Nana before Aizawa and Yamada adopted her, just to make sure she'd be happy with them. Izuku hoped Kouda would have time for the list of questions he'd written in his notebook in preparation… Animal Whisper was just such a cool quirk! (Mainly, he was wondering whether humans counted as 'animals,' since if they did, Kouda might be able to use his quirk like Hitoshi did, a bit. Or maybe Hitoshi could see if he could command animals as well as humans, if there was an overlap. Man, if that was true, they might be able to do things like help train police dogs and therapy animals as a hero side job!)

"Ten minutes until the train!" Hitoshi called from the kitchen. Izuku hurriedly finished brushing, gargled, spat, and splashed water over his face. He grinned at the mirror. He was so ready for this day!

Izuku squeezed his eyes shut, opened them again, and blinked. The note on his desk didn't vanish, like he was hoping it would. The handwriting was familiar, as was the faint sweet smell of smoke from the scorched edges. Kacchan must have been really angry…

"Stay after class, fucking Deku," was all it said. Biting his lip, Izuku raised his eyes from his desk to meet the blazing red eyes of his childhood friend across the row. Katsuki glared harder, waiting.

Izuku gulped and nodded, sagging in relief as Katsuki turned back to face the board. He had some idea of what this might be about-- Hitoshi *had* used his quirk in public, after all, Kacchan was probably angry, no, furious, that he'd been caught in it, but... why would he be asking Izuku to stay behind? Was he supposed to give Hitoshi a message from Katsuki?

...Was it possible Katsuki was scared to speak to Hitoshi himself?

Izuku covered his mouth, making sure he wasn't thinking aloud. If that was true, and that was a big *if*, then… Katsuki would be even angrier. He hated anything like weakness. Which was why he hated Izuku. This could be… really, really bad.

...He still had bandages and burn cream in his backpack. If… the usual happened. He might have to take the day off from Aikido but, he'd, he'd be fine. Eventually.

Izuku sunk deeper in his seat, hunching his shoulders fruitlessly. That warm feeling he'd been carrying all weekend, cradled in his chest, sputtered and died.

Hitoshi looked up as Izuku finally approached the school gates. "Hey! Where were you? We have to get going," he said, starting to turn towards the bus station. They wouldn't be late if they caught the next bus, but they would be cutting it close. Kawai-sensei didn't like people coming in part-way through a lesson.

"S-s-s--" Izuku hitched a breath, let it out and signed, *Sorry. Sorry l-a-t-e* as he hurried to match Hitoshi's pace.

"Did the teacher ask you to stay? I thought you asked for all your cleaning days to be Tuesdays and Thursdays for lessons."

Izuku frowned but nodded. *Teacher. H-o-m-e-w-o-r-k question .*

"You… sure you're okay?" They'd made it to the stop, with a few minutes to spare. Hitoshi eyed his silent, pale-faced friend. "You look a little sick."

Izuku shook his head. *I'm fine.*

"And is there a reason you took off your jacket? I thought you were cold this morning." Hitoshi could see goosebumps on Izuku's arms.

Jacket d-i-r-t-y. Izuku looked away, hunching in on himself.

"Do you want to borrow mine? I think I still have my scarf in my bag, so I'm good." Hitoshi slid his backpack onto one shoulder and started rummaging through it. He didn't see Izuku's hands waving, *no no no I'm fine.*

Smiling, Hitoshi pulled the scarf from his backpack (it had been hiding under his science notebook) and wrapped it around his friend's shoulders. Izuku tried to smile back but it fell off his face.

"Seriously… are you okay?" Hitoshi asked, eyeing his friend over. Maybe he'd caught a cold? He hadn't seemed sick this morning, though.

Izuku shook his head. *Thank you. I'm **fine.***

Hitosh raised an eyebrow. Izuku turned to stare at the bus schedule

intently.

“Izu…”

Fine Fine Fine Fine . Izuku’s hand slapped against his chest as he repeated the sign.

“... I was just gonna say that the bus is here.”

… Oh. Izuku dropped his hands, blushing. He followed his bemused friend onto the bus and slouched against the pole after they showed the driver their passes.

“I won’t ask again if you’re okay, but… you know I’m here if you want to talk. Or sign,” Hitoshi said, low-voiced under the automated bus announcement.

Izuku nodded. *Thank you.* He placed his hand on his chest and slid it slightly downward. *I know.*

“Good.” Hitoshi eyed him for a second, then turned to his phone. If the “I’m here for you” talk didn’t yield results, he knew who to text for reinforcements.

Shouta had expected some trouble when Hitoshi texted before the boys’ lesson but… this was concerning. Hitoshi, he could read perfectly well, after years of deciphering which morning scowls meant hunger and which meant insomnia-fueled crankiness. It helped that

the kid tended to mirror his expressions more often than not.

Green kid, though, his expressions switched from calm and happy to upset or tearful at the drop of a hat, and it wasn't always easy to tell the cause. For now, the problem child was curled up next to Hitoshi on the bench, arms wrapped around his knees. He was currently sneaking sideways glances at Hitoshi, who had lounged backwards in his "defying authority" pose but kept glancing back to his friend.

Someday, Shouta would no longer find that cute.

"Explain," he prompted. Kawai-sensei had already called him to let him know what had happened, but he wanted to hear it in their words.

"I-it was my fault--" "That kid nearly killed him--"

The talking at the same time thing was, unfortunately, also cute.

"Midoriya," he prompted, one hand gesturing at Hitoshi to *shh!* His son rolled his eyes but settled further into his seat.

"I. Um. We w-w-were in the locker room," Izuku started, glancing again at Hitoshi. "I w-wasn't, um, watching. Where I was going. T-Tanaka-kun was t-t-talking with his f-friend. He-- I tripped."

Shouta noted that Hitoshi's frown had become a scowl as Izuku explained.

“Thank you. Toshi, your turn.” He nodded at the green kid, who curled up tighter into his ball.

“It wasn’t an accident! Ta-*baka* was laughing with his friend about Izu being in the kids’ class, he said some shit about Quirkless people being no better than toddlers, then he stuck out his foot while Izu was passing!” His son shifted so he was glaring at Kawai’s office, where she was currently having a talk with the other kid. “Izu nearly fell onto the changing benches, he could have been hurt!”

Shouta sighed, bringing his hand up to pinch the bridge of his nose.

“And this is supposed to explain why you controlled both boys in the locker room and had them write “Idiot” on their foreheads with permanent marker?”

Hitoshi nodded, fully justified. “They should come with a warning label.”

Izuku sunk further into his ball. His hands were clasped, wrist to wrist, tightly enough that they trembled.

“And *why* … did you have to brainwash them in the locker room?” he asked.

“Because it was too close-quarters for a fight, Izu could have gotten hurt,” Hitoshi answered promptly.

Shouta sighed. “For future reference, kid, there are no security cameras in your changing room. That would defeat the *purpose* of a changing room. So there is no impartial witness to prove you used

your quirk in self-defense." Keep this in mind for next time, he very carefully didn't say.

Hitoshi scowled.

"In normal circumstances, it would be your word against theirs… and we both know how that would look." Shouta eyed both boys seriously. "Any incidences on your permanent record showing you do not follow the law to the letter… would look very bad for hero school applications."

Hitoshi squirmed in his seat. Izuku, unable to curl up any further, started sniffling back tears.

"Luckily, this time one of the other boys in the locker room was willing to come forward and support your claim of self-defense. He is the reason you will not be receiving any caution or warning from the police. Hitoshi, you and Tanaka will still be suspended from lessons until next week," he smirked slightly, "by which time the 'Idiot' sign will hopefully wash off."

Hitoshi relaxed, finally, sitting forward and offering Shouta a rueful half-smile.

"Izuku, you are welcome to come to lessons this week, and Hitoshi and I will still come pick you up. Your mother already agreed you can stay at our house Wednesday night anyway, since she'll be busy until late that evening."

The miserable ball of boy didn't relax, exactly, but he did look up to give Shouta a weak, watery smile.

Shouta clapped his hands. “Lecture over.”

Hitoshi bounced up, turning to lend Izuku a hand up. “See, I told you he wouldn’t yell,” he assured the other boy. Head bowed, Izuku pulled himself up and nodded mutely. “I’ll grab our bags.” As he walked away, Hitoshi shot Shouta a ‘do something!’ look.

He must have learned that one from Hizashi, they had the same undertone of ‘I tried already, now it’s your turn.’

“Kid.” Shouta dropped a hand onto Izuku’s shoulder. “You’re not in trouble.”

As he probably should have expected, that was the phrase that started the waterworks. As he rummaged in his pocket, he thanked Hitoshi mentally. “Bring extra handkerchiefs to aikido today” indeed.

Chapter End Notes

> We interrupt your regularly scheduled fluff with a dash of angst. I very, VERY nearly named this chapter Katsu-quences. You're welcome.
>
> Just realized the timing of the chapter might seem a little strange-- Hitoshi was invited to stay the whole weekend with the Midoriyas, so this is just Monday morning after that weekend. Yamada and Aizawa were both working weekend nights and the Midoriyas live closer to school anyway, so it worked out.
>
> I was going to have the boys bake cookies but realistically speaking the Midoriyas probably don't have access to anything bigger than a microwave oven. So they made mug cakes instead. I have never successfully baked any dessert in a microwave, but the boys have plot shield so nothing exploded or was set on fire. Recipe: https://www.allrecipes.com/recipe/241038/microwave-chocolate-mug-cake/
>
> About Inko using her quirk: I wish she did it more in the actual

show, I think Izuku would def feel guilty if his quirklessness made his mom feel bad about her own powers. So they had a talk! And now she's practicing with it more in the house. Inko accidentally-on-purpose becoming competent and terrifying is my favorite.

The boy who defended Hitoshi and Izuku about the locker room conflict was Kobayashi (most recently known as the kid Izuku accidentally punched in the face). He's not one to hold grudges.

Sign language for this chapter:

No (kind of a wave next to your face): https://www.google.com/search?q=%E6%89%8B%E8%A9%B1+%E3%81%84%E3%81%84%E3%81%88&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&%253A%252CTTOM7P-xAgs9ZM%252C_&vet=1&usg=AI4_-kR5C8ybe1gDYTQU4LMRu6jK2FcEdg&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjYg-z5_KrjAhXKHDQIHUMsAysQ9QEwBnoECAUQDg#imgrc=A_qX8u0DS3Mz

I'm fine: http://hs84.blog.jp/archives/56206.html

I know (number four): http://www.syuwabenkyokai.jp/syuwa_talk/2008/02/31-0bb7.html

Thank you and sorry are in a previous chapter note but here they are again if you're curious: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQ8VWpZWg-Q

Next chapter, we find out what Katsuki told Izuku and why he was not wearing his jacket.

Confrontation

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Saturday afternoon.

Hatefully familiar snickers. “Do the face” in a hushed undertone. Silence. Deku’s voice. “I-i-is that good?”

The Purple Fucker again, “Perfect, Izu. Now let me send it to everyone we know.” “W-wait, no--!”

His mother turning off the phone as he entered the room, taking one look at his livid face and bursting into giggles. Refusing to show him the video Aunty Inko had sent her. The dawning realization of what must have happened in that blank period of time before those weakling assholes (let him go) ran away. The knowledge, burning like a coal in the pit of his stomach, that Deku and Purple Fucker would die Monday.

“Did you think it was funny?” He asked, fists clenched. Released to stretch aching fingers, tensed again.

Deku had the gall to look confused. “W-what?

“Bet you thought it was fuckin’ hilarious.” Clench. “Was it your idea or his?” Release. Breathe. Clench. It had to have been Purple Fucker’s idea, Deku was too much of a goody-goody. Reason number 5,000 Katsuki hated him.

“Hi-Hicchan only d-did it in self-defense,” Deku stammered, eyes flicking from his face to his hands.

“Oh, *really*.” Lips curled in a snarl. “Self-defense. That’s why you took

a video to send to ‘everyone you know.’” Don’t strangle the nerd, don’t strangle that *fucking liar*, even when he goes back to faking confusion, fake, fake, *looking down on you*.

“Wha-wha-what video, Ka-Kaccha--” Hand on the nerd’s lying throat, fist in his lying gut. Shove him backwards, staggering through the line of desks until he hit wall. Couldn’t let the slippery *lying fucker* squirm his way out of this.

“Stop. Fucking. Lying.”

“I-I-I’m n-n-n-” Shove his head back so it smacked against the wall.

“What did I just! Fucking! Say!”

The nerd just gulped and nodded, eyes wide. Final-fucking-ly.

“You and that Purple Mindfucker took a video Saturday. I heard when Auntie Inko sent it to the old hag. Who the fuck else did you send it to?”

“Th-th-that wasn’t--” Squeeze the hand at his throat slowly. A warning. Feel his words sputter out and die. Good.

“I heard it. Purple Fuck saying “do the face.” Then *your* fucking stutter ‘Is that g-g-g-good enough?’” Voice high and mocking, watch as he flinched back. “And then your fucking *future villain butt buddy* goes, ‘Perfect, Izu. Now let’s send it to everyone we know.’” Deku gulped hard, paling.

“So here’s how it’s gonna go.” Voice almost pleasant now. “You’re going to send me that video. And then delete it. And if Purple Fuck ever talks to me, or *looks in my direction*, I will go to the police with evidence he used his quirk illegally in a public place. I’m sure they’d be *happy* to make a note of it on his permanent record. After all, he’s just a warning away from being blacklisted for villainy anyway.” Watch the look on Deku’s chubby fucking face turn from shock to horror.

Step back, point made. “Send it tonight, fuckface.” Turn away just as his fast breath turns into sobs.

“W-w-wait.”

Turn back, expecting that teary fucking crybaby face.

Deku was.

Laughing.

“I-It’s not going to work, Kacchan.”

Growl, fists catching a spark, “Dekuuuuuuuu--”

The nerd flinched back, hands raised. “Hicchan’s n-not like that. You ca-can see the video! It’s *not you,* Kacchan! W-we were at a cat café! He wasn’t using his--”

“Don’t you fucking dare try to lie to me,” ground out between

clenched teeth. “I have *evidence*.” Pause, beginning to grin nastily. “And even if I didn’t, say I go to the police. Purple Mindfucker used his quirk on me, and I *can’t remember anything that happened next*, officer! He’s friends with the only kid in school fucking stupid enough not to know how to defend himself! Better keep an eye out for him before he finally figures out he’s just another third-rate villain!”

“I-I never figured you for a coward, K-K-Kacchan.” Deku’s voice high-pitched but steady as he pulled himself straight. “Y-you’re just af-afraid of him.”

That did it.

“Do I look. Like I’m afraid. Of anyone?” Stride forwards, palms sparking wildly. “I’m not *you*, Deku.” Hands clenched at the front of the nerd’s jacket, already smoking. “I’m. Better!” One final explosion, loud enough to knock him back against the wall head-first. Barely glance as he slides to the floor, tears streaming. “You’re pathetic, Deku. Don’t forget.”

Leave him shaking on the floor. Where he belonged.

Shouta raised a hand to his chest, settling it against Midoriya’s head as the kid leaned into him and cried. The boy flinched away. He blinked and looked down.

“Kid, did you hit your head when you fell?” If so, he had an apology to give Toshi, and a score to settle with that Tanaka kid.

“N-n-no. It- It was--” The kid’s shoulders shook harder. “I-I can’t t-t-tell.”

He settled his hands on Midoriya’s shoulders, easing back so he could look the kid in the eyes. “Midoriya. If someone else hurt you, you can talk to Hizashi, your mother, or me. But you *will* tell an adult, *today*.”

Midoriya hunched further back, shaking his head frantically. “I-I-I can’t!”

Shouta scowled, thinking. He noticed Midoriya cringing back and made an effort to lose the expression. Scaring the kid further was counter to his purpose.

“Okay.” He pressed the handkerchief into Midoriya’s hand and patted his shoulder again. “Here’s how it’s going to go. I’ll drop Hitoshi off first. And then you will tell me what happened, or I will call your mother and take you to the hospital to see how badly you’re injured.”

The kid looked horrified, then pleading, but Shouta would not bend on this. No matter how big those eyes got, he would do whatever was necessary to protect his-- the kid.

“...o-okay.” Midoriya was whispering, eyeing Hitoshi as he re-entered the room. “B-but you can’t tell!”

Shouta hummed, neither confirming nor denying. No matter what the kid wanted, if he was seriously hurt, Shouta had a duty as a teacher, a parent and a hero to report it.

“U-um. D-d-do you want some tea, A-Aizawa-san?” The kid pulled his shoes off and headed into the apartment, not meeting his eyes.

“Sure.” It would probably help the kid open up, having something to do with his hands.

Silently, Midoriya padded into the kitchen, switched on the electric kettle and pulled a box of green tea from one of the drawers in the kitchen. Decaf, hopefully. The last thing the kid needed was more adrenaline in his system.

Shouta waited until they were both settled at the kitchen table, hands cupped around steaming mugs. “So. What’s going on, kid?”

Midoriya bit his lip, looking down at his hands. “I-I want you to promise you won’t tell. I-It’s not that bad, really! I-I have it under c-c-control.”

Shouta hummed. “What’s under control?”

Midoriya looked back up, swallowed hard. “P-p-please promise, Aizawa-san.”

Shouta sighed. “*If* you are not in danger of being seriously hurt, you *have not* been seriously hurt, and what you say does not involve anyone *else* being seriously hurt, I promise not to tell.” Not to tell anyone but Hizashi and Mrs. Midoriya, he meant. He wouldn’t keep a secret about Izuku from his mother.

Midoriya sighed and sat back in his chair, gaze returning to his hands. “I-it was… a friend. He th-thought Hitoshi and I u-used Hitoshi’s quirk

to… take a mean video of him."

Shouta frowned. That was an oddly specific accusation. So far as he knew, Hitoshi hadn't used his quirk on anyone but the Tanaka kid. "And this 'friend' is…?"

Midoriya shook his head. "Th-that's not really im-important. He was… hurt. And s-scared."

Shouta sighed. Like pulling teeth, seriously. "What did he do, Midoriya?"

The kid shrugged slightly. "G-got angry."

"At you? When was this?" It must have happened at school, that was the only time he and Hitoshi had been apart since this weekend. Inseparable, those kids.

"J-just after class. H-he wanted me to s-send him the v-v-video. And he--" Midoriya sniffled slightly, voice rising. "He, He said he'd go to the police! A-A-And say he didn't r-r-remember what Hicchan told him to do, a-a-and keep him from being a hero!" That face again, aimed straight at him. How the hell did the kid manage to get his eyes that big? Shouta squirmed slightly, uncomfortable with the sudden urge to pat the kid on the head and promise everything would be okay.

"Did he hurt you?" he asked instead. The kid shook his head, looking down again as a tear fell. "Midoriya-- *Izuku.* I need to know." Voice lower, almost gentle. "Did he. Hurt you?" Because if he did, I will murder him and have Hizashi hide the body.

“H-he was hurt,” the kid said again. “He… was holding my shoulders. I fell against the wall.”

‘Fell.’ Yeah, right. “So, your head. Anywhere else?”

Izuku shrugged again, using just the right shoulder. His left, then? “Kid, did you hurt your shoulder?”

“I-it’s just… a bit?” Biting his lip, the kid pulled the collar of his shirt down slightly, showing a patch of skin that looked reddened and sunburned. Some kind of heat-manipulation quirk, then. That would make it easier to find the culprit. “It’s not h-his fault.”

“He burned you accidentally, then?”

The kid bit his lip and didn’t answer. Shouta sighed. “Why do you not want me to report this, Midoriya?”

“B-B-Because he wants to be a hero, too!” The kid burst out, looking shocked at his own volume. “H-He’s always wanted to, since we were kids!” Still are kids, Shouta mentally corrected. “I… I *can’t* be the reason his d-dream… I *can’t.* ”

“So it’s fine if he hurts you because he wants to be a hero?” Shouta asked, sarcastic. Izuku nodded, then paused, confused.

“I-- He doesn’t-- It’s not like--” The kid sighed and tried again. “H-he’s not always… angry. He’s. Strong. And really, really smart. I… I *know* he can be a, a good hero.”

“The first duty of a hero is to *protect*, kid,” Shouta said wearily. He’d run into this attitude time and time again. “Strength alone isn’t enough. Strength that you use to *hurt* is the sign of a villain, not a hero.”

The kid gulped. “I… I know. A-and if he *does* try to hurt Hitoshi, I-I know what I have to do.”

‘Hurt Hitoshi,’ Shouta noted. Yeah, that was Izuku through and through.

“So what’s your plan,” he prompted. Because the kid had a plan, he could tell.

“T-tonight, I send him the video. A-and a picture.” Izuku looked up, determination burning in his eyes. “A picture of my jacket and my shoulder. I-If he goes to the po-police about Hitoshi, I…” he bit his lip but forged on. “*I will, too.* ”

Shouta couldn’t help it. He started chuckling. This kid…!

“You’re keeping the evidence. As blackmail,” he stated. “When did you come up with that?”

The kid smiled a little, timidly. “Wh-when he mentioned going to the police.”

Shouta shook his head, sobering slightly. “You came up with a plan on the fly, and followed through. Well done,” he praised. Izuku obviously wasn’t expecting to be praised, and he flushed a deep pink. “But you forgot two things when you made that plan. Can you tell me what

they were?"

"U-um," he shook his head.

Shouta leaned forward slightly, face serious. "Hizashi and I would *never* let some playground bully mess with Hitoshi's future. No matter what, we *will* support him and his dream." And yours, but it was probably too early to say that. He didn't want the kid to start crying even harder, after all.

Izuku nodded and swiped at his cheeks, looking embarrassed. He wasn't used to the idea that he could turn to adults for help, it seemed.

"And second… when you made that plan. Did you provoke him into using his quirk on you?" Shouta wasn't entirely sure, but it seemed like a very Midoriya thing to do.

The kid bit his lip but nodded slightly.

"Any plan that depends on you being hurt is a *bad plan*, kid. Running away is an option. Acting like you agree and then going off to regroup is an option. *Calling for backup* is an option. When you're by yourself with someone who is angry, making them lose control is a *risk*, kid." He reached out and ruffled Midoriya's curls firmly. "Don't. Take. Stupid risks. Got it?"

The kid nodded, eyes wide.

"Good. Now, what's the kid's name?"

The kid shook his head.

“I can and will ask Hitoshi. I’m assuming you don’t want him to know…?” Shouta prodded.

Izuku deflated, took a sip of his tea. Stalling.

“Midoriya.”

“K-katsuki Bakugou,” he whispered.

“Good.” On a whim, Shouta ruffled the kid’s hair again. “So, here’s how it’s going to go. You will keep that jacket I assume you’re holding in evidence. I will help you buy another for school.” The kid smiled, tremulous but wide. “You will *not* send a picture or do anything to let Bakugou know you have it.” If he’d read things right, that would only lead to an escalation. “Since the term is almost over, I won’t be able to transfer you out of his class immediately. But after summer break, you will be joining Hitoshi’s class.” Or Shouta would launch a police investigation of the entire school for quirk discrimination, but that hardly needed saying. “I will have a *talk* with Bakugou and his parents, and if he threatens you or Hitoshi *or any other student*, he will be banned from applying to hero schools immediately.”

Midoriya looked rebellious at that, but Shouta merely raised an eyebrow. “This is not on you, Midoriya. Any kid who misuses his quirk on an innocent does not deserve to be rewarded for it.”

“B-but! Hero school is--” The kid paused, reordering his thoughts. “Hero schools were-- weren’t originally a reward!”

Shouta smirked slightly. So the kid did know, after all. “Go on.”

“Th-they started as-- as education programs. In prisons.” Midoriya gulped but continued. “Th-they were an attempt to, to prove that people w-with powerful quirks could be, could be trained. To use them for good. A-and that they didn’t have to, to be villains.”

“‘Villain’ didn’t come into popular use as a term for criminals until after the first hero school programs were created,” Shouta noted. Midoriya waved a hand in acknowledgement.

“I-I know. But… that’s what they’re for! The schools. For kids with, with powers to learn how to use them to *help.* To p-protect. Ka-Kacchan deserves a chance. To learn that. B-Because he’d be a, a really powerful hero.” Shouta met Midoriya’s eyes and saw the truth the kid was trying to avoid.

“Because if he doesn’t become a hero, he’d be a powerful villain,” he finished, very softly. Midoriya winced, tears beginning to well up. “He’s not your responsibility, kid. His future is on *him.* ”

The kid had no answer for that, curling inward. Shouta sighed. He wouldn’t push any further tonight.

“It’s getting late. I’ll make dinner and we can wait for your mom to get home.” He didn’t want to leave the kid alone like this, looking defeated and small. “Finish your homework and you can watch cat videos.” That always cheered Hitoshi up, anyway.

Midoriya looked up at him, tears slipping silently down his face. *Thank you*, he signed. Done with talking, apparently.

“Alright, fine, you can watch the cat videos first,” he grumbled, looking away. The kid stood up and walked tentatively closer. *No. **Thank you.***

Shouta sighed. Again, how the hell did the kid make his eyes so big and… and sparkly, dammit. He ran a hand through his hair and sighed again.

“Midoriya. Do you want a hug?”

The kid’s jaw dropped open, but he closed it and nodded slowly. Shouta raised an arm and let the kid step under it, bringing him to his side in a gentle squeeze. He didn’t cry, surprisingly, but his shoulders trembled for a little while. Shouta let him lean in until the kid tensed slightly, then lifted his arm to let the kid pull away. He couldn’t resist one last pat to the kid’s fluffy, fluffy head.

“Cat videos. Scoot. I’ll call you when dinner is ready.”

His kid flashed him a small, bright smile and scooted.

Shouta sighed, long and drawn out. He pulled open the fridge to find the meal Mrs. Midoriya had left for her son and set it on a plate to reheat. While it heated, he texted Hizashi. *“We need to talk about Plant Kid.”*

Chapter End Notes

> I am... not entirely happy with this chapter and it's likely some of y'all won't be happy with it either. Aizawa letting Katsuki "get away" with hurting Izuku was hard to write. (Or at least, telling Izuku he would let Katsuki get away with it. He won't be that easy on someone who hurt his kid.) I hope it came through

clearly in the beginning, but Katsuki heard his mom listening to the "Pleading for Pumpkin" video and assumed Hitoshi and Izuku took a video of him making faces by using Hitoshi's quirk. And then sent it around to make fun of him. (This is to explain, not excuse Katsuki's actions. In his mind, he is completely justified for 'getting back' at both of them.)

Still, there is a reason Katsuki will be allowed to apply for hero schools (the same reason I assume Aizawa let the original Grape Bastard stay in hero class in canon). Pro hero schools are not a reward for kids with strong quirks. They are meant to take people with powers, teach them skills, and convince them that they can use their powers to help others. Katsuki is exactly the type of person these programs were created to deal with. Izuku and Aizawa are correct-- if Katsuki is not taught to be a hero, he could be a very powerful villain. By keeping an eye on him and letting him know he is being watched for his behavior, they can control the problem instead of punishing him and letting him slip through the cracks.

Conferences

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Inko's thoughts were fuzzy as she plodded out of the subway station, running repetitive tracks of work regrets and future worries. If Uehara tried one more time to take credit for her contributions to the opening of the new office, Inko vowed she would "spill" salt in the woman's coffee for a week. Normally she was very forgiving about any sort of trouble in the workplace, but that woman's pointed comments about 'broken families' and 'children needing both parents for stability' were like, well, like the snapped wire in her bra that kept poking her in the ribs, actually.

So maybe Hisashi hadn't called for a few weeks. Last time he'd said he was busy with his younger coworkers, showing them the ropes-- not that he would discuss exactly what he was up to. Always secretive, that man, but she'd known that when she married him. So what if he hadn't been able to take vacation time for a year, a few years, he worked hard for her and Izuku! And she would do something drastic to the next person who implied her family was *broken*.

Hisashi had always said it was cute how murderous she could get when she was tired.

Her feet ached from the pinch of her heels, she felt overly sweaty from the crowded train, she was nearly sure the man behind her had snuck a grope at her ass, and overall she was ready to scarf some leftovers, soak in the tub and say hello to her bed. Izuku would most likely be in bed by the time she got home, reading under the covers the way he did when he didn't want her to know he was staying up reading articles. With a sigh of relief, she rode the elevator to their apartment, unlocked the door and dropped bag, coat and shoes in the hallway. Turning to the side, she reached behind her back, and unhooked her bra with a sigh of relief. That was… so… much… better.

Sagging with exhaustion now, she walked into the kitchen, still fully lit. “Izu, don’t leave the lights on if you’re…”

Inko blinked at Aizawa, sat at the kitchen table glaring at his phone. He looked up and gave her a nod.

“Ai…zawa…san?” What was he doing here?

“Midoriya-san.” He stood and bowed. “I was hoping to talk to you. Did you see my message?”

Her phone had lost battery halfway through her trip home, just another shitty part in her crap sandwich of a day. She shook her head.

“I apologize for intruding on your evening. Izuku was involved in another bullying episode at school and I wanted to make sure you knew.”

Inko grasped at the chair in front of her, legs weak. “Another— Is my baby okay? I thought— he said they stopped! How badly is he hurt?” She spun, nearly slipping on her stockings as she turned to Izuku’s room. Aizawa cleared his throat and raised a hand, signaling for her to stop.

“The kid’s okay. Banged his head a little and his shoulder has what looks like a mild burn, but he says he provoked the bully on purpose.” From Aizawa’s wry tone, she gathered that he thought this was somehow funny. She might have snapped at him for that if she weren’t so occupied pondering which of his classmates could have burned him.

“He-- you said-- another? But he-- and the school never--” Horrifyingly, she felt her face heat and tears start prickling at her eyes. “They *told me* they’d stopped it! In, in fifth grade! There was an assembly, and, and Izu never said anything, and--” She couldn’t tell if it was anger, fear or shame coursing through her veins, but whatever it was burned like scalding sludge, roiling in the pit of her stomach. Tears dripped unheeded down her cheeks.

Aizawa, through the haze of her vision, frowned harder and dug a handkerchief out of his pocket, offering it to her. She shook her head and swiped at her face with the back of her sleeve.

“*Who was it,* Aizawa-san.” She barely recognized her own voice, low and strained.

He sighed. “Sit down, Midoriya-san. I’ll tell you what I know.”

By the end of the story, her hands were clenched on each other, trembling.

“...Kacchan did?” Her voice was weak. “But… they were so close. Always running together, playing hero… like brothers, I always thought-- and he never-- always saying Kacchan did well on a test, did best in gym, was, was this happening the whole time and I never--” She wasn’t making sense, but her thoughts weren’t making sense, either.

“From what Hitoshi’s told me, Bakugou is the ringleader, at least for Izuku’s class. He wasn’t the one who pushed Izuku down the stairs, but Hitoshi’s had to intervene other times.” Aizawa’s voice was blunt, but not unkind.

“Izu was *pushed down the stairs?!* ” Belatedly, Inko remembered to

keep her voice down. The walls in their home were not thick.

Aizawa blinked at her and sighed. “...For now, it’s safe to assume that any injury Izuku got from ‘falling’ or ‘being clumsy’ was caused by a classmate.”

Inko choked on a sob. The bruises she’d glimpsed on her boy’s arms throughout his childhood, the way he occasionally limped or seemed sore, injuries she’d worried and fussed over, at least until Izuku started to assert that he could care for them himself. Injuries of an active boy, she’d assumed, and wasn’t that so blind of her, to see her lonely boy and the way his smile faded and think that everything was fine. To think he was still that happy four-year-old banging his knees on the playground and bouncing back up to chase after his best friend. When had that changed, and how had she never noticed?

“I don’t understand,” she whispered. “Why did he never tell me? I could have *helped.* ”

Aizawa sighed again and set a gentle hand over hers, barely-there pressure against her clenched knuckles. “... Hitoshi used to bite his lips until they bled,” he said.

“H-huh?” Sniffling, she met his eyes.

“We met when he was nine. Quiet, barely spoke, kept biting his lips raw. He stopped after a while, my friend figured out that he liked mint chapstick and it helped him break the habit.”

Inko drew her hands back, and Aizawa leaned back, mirroring. “What does that have to do with, with Izuku?” She mopped at her face again, trying to settle her breathing.

“When he turned twelve, he finally told us. Middle of dinner. Turns out one of the older kids at his foster family had a quirk they couldn’t control, so they used to scratch their arms till they bled. The kid told him pain would help him control his quirk so that the family wouldn’t be afraid of him.”

Inko pressed a hand against her mouth. “That’s horrible!”

Aizawa nodded. “But not uncommon.”

She had no answer for that.

“Three years after we met him, two years after he’d stopped… that’s when he felt comfortable telling us. Any time we asked before that, he’d just shrug.” Aizawa glanced at his phone again, checking for a response, it looked like. “Kids don’t always tell us what we need to know, it’s not a judgment. It’s just how they work.”

Inko pulled her arms around herself. “He told *you.* ”

Aizawa shrugged. “I cornered him. Besides, Bakugou threatened Hitoshi too. He… He’s better at protecting others than himself.”

Inko laughed, a humorless sound. “He’s always wanted to be a hero. If only he… Well.” She hugged herself tighter.

For a moment, she was sure Aizawa’s eyes had turned red as he glared. The next moment, his face had smoothed over again. “Izuku’s future aside. Bakugou threatened both of our children, on the false

assumption that they took a video of him. I told Izuku to go ahead and send over the real video, no reason to foster that delusion."

"Why did Kacchan-- Katsuki think it was of him?"

"I assume because Hitoshi used his quirk on him at some point. He must have heard when Toshi told Izuku to make that… face he does. Misunderstood."

Inko felt the corners of her mouth twitching, involuntary. "He's good at it. The eyes."

Aizawa clapped his hands, a 'change of subject' signal. "Anyway. I plan to visit the Bakugous tomorrow evening. After that meeting with the cat they found. You're welcome to come. I think it might be best if the both of us… had a talk with them. About what happened, and how to keep it from happening again." His tone implied that this would never happen again *or else.* Inko couldn't disagree.

"I'll be home after 7 tomorrow. I can call Mitsuki tonight and set something up." She glanced at the clock. It was late, but not so late that her friend would be in bed. "Thank you, Aizawa-san. For letting me know. I… will see you tomorrow."

Aizawa nodded at her solemnly, collected his phone, and left. He set the handkerchief, a soft cloth covered in paw-print patterns, at her elbow as he passed. "Until tomorrow, Midoriya-san."

Inko sat at the table as his steps faded down the hall, as the door latched, as the apartment settled back into quiet. She heated her dinner and sat, eating bite by bite, as tears pooled again in her eyes and ran down her cheeks. Finally, she pushed her plate away and hunched over, hugging herself. "I'm sorry, Izuku. I'm so sorry," she

whispered.

Izuku slumped against his bedroom door, pressing his forehead against his knees in a defensive ball. Aizawa had finally told him he'd be telling his mom, when he'd asked why the man was staying. No amount of pleading would make him relent.

So Izuku had pretended to go to bed early, and listened at his bedroom door. It was what he used to do when Hisashi called home and he and Mom had "adult conversations" he wasn't supposed to listen in on. Arguments, really, even if they never shouted or called each other names like the Bakugous did. He still hated it, having to listen to his mom trying to defend her purchases of hero figures for him, or the need for a new computer when their old one had broken down and Izuku wanted to type up his research. He hated sitting here in the aftermath, listen to his mom break down because of him.

Crouched against the cold floor, Izuku curled over himself and shook. Over and over again in his mind, he heard her sob, *'I'm sorry, Izuku, I'm so sorry.'*

Chapter End Notes

> As it turns out, we're not quite done with the angst. The Katsuquences arc will end after the Talk with the Bakugous, then we're back to our regularly scheduled fluff. (I wanted to finish up this chapter but Inko's POV wouldn't let me go, so here we are.) Izuku was listening at the door because of course he was.

Catharsis

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hitoshi was nearly skipping as they walked to the café, turning around every few steps to direct another remark at Izuku.

"-- and Support is great with new cats, she'll probably spend a few days trying to groom Nana like a kitten, she even does that to Aizawa, Izuku are you listening?"

Izuku jerked, looking up at his friend. "U-um. S-s-support?" Behind his back, his hands twisted together.

"Yeah… You okay? You've been quiet all day." Plus there were bags under his eyes, and he'd barely reacted to the last five puns Hitoshi had slipped into their conversation. Distinctly un-Izuku behavior, and therefore suspicious.

Under Hitoshi's concerned gaze, Izuku wilted slightly.

"I-It's n-n-n-" For some reason, it was always harder to talk when he hadn't slept well the night before. He shrugged a shoulder instead. "T-tired."

Hitoshi hummed and turned back to face forward, casually stepping a bit closer so he could bump his shoulder against Izuku's. Not hard enough to knock him over or mess with his stride, but a solid moment of contact. A silent 'I'm here.'

He counted the shaky smile he received as thanks.

"Will you be okay to meet up with Kouda? If you're too tired, you can always claim a headache and sit it out while we talk." That was his go-to excuse, since people didn't take 'I'm too tired to be a person right now' as a good excuse. Insomnia and introversion really didn't mix well.

I'm fine. Thank you. Izuku bit his lip and then stepped slightly closer to return the shoulder bump. *Anyway. I like Kouda.*

Hitoshi thought back to the fifty pictures of rabbits he'd received over the past two days and couldn't hold back a grin. "Yeah, he is pretty awesome, huh?"

Behind them, a startled squeak sounded. If it weren't for the sound of footsteps, Hitoshi might have thought it was a passing cat. He turned to look back, Izuku following his lead.

Kouji, five feet behind them, had covered his face with both hands, blushing a bright red. From the corner of his eye, Hitoshi could see Izuku's face beginning to match. For a moment, they just stood there, frozen.

"...This is the kind of silence," he reflected, "they mean when they say you can hear a pun drop."

Wait for it.

Wait for it.

Wait for--

“Hi-Hicchan! Th-that was *terrible!”* Izuku, still red-faced, turned to smack him on the shoulder. “Y-y-you can’t just, just pun your way through awkward-- um.”

Kouji was muffling laughter behind his hands, but not well enough. They turned to face him, just as he took a wheezing breath and then broke down, guffawing.

Hitoshi exchanged a delighted look with Izuku. There was no denying it.

Kouji had a weird laugh.

Like, imagine if you somehow mixed up a dog happy-barking with a squirrel chittering and took it down an octave or two. And then tickled the dog and the squirrel. It would be hard to identify as laughter if you couldn’t see Kouji slowly doubling over, face growing steadily pinker as he struggled to breathe. It was even harder to resist joining in.

Izuku’s lips were twitching even though he struggled to keep a straight face as Hitoshi leaned helplessly against him, snickering. “I-It’s not that f-funny, Kouda-kun,” he tried. “You sh-shouldn’t encourage h-h-him.”

P-u-n. D-r-o-p, Kouji spelled out, one-handed. He straightened up, still chortling, and wiped at his eyes. *Not funny. It’s g-e-n-i-u-s.*

“Thank you!” Hitoshi cried, vindicated.

Izuku looked between them and sighed. “N-now there’s *two of them*,” he muttered. Hitoshi patted him on the shoulder, barely noticing how he flinched at the contact.

“You know what they say. If you can’t beat them…” He grinned.

Izuku nodded. “T-try harder.”

Kouji looked ready to start laughing again, but he waved to get their attention. *Shall we go up? I want to see Nana again.*

“You have a point,” Hitoshi agreed. “So does Nana.”

Izuku leveled a look at him.

“Several points. At least six. Wait, how many toes do cats have?” Hitoshi grimaced. “That one got away from me.”

Izuku nodded pointedly.

“Guess I got… pun-formance anxiety.” Hitoshi dodged the smack and bounded into the building, closely followed by his friends. By the time they reached the right floor, they were flushed and giggling like preschoolers. Aizawa, slouched on a seat in the waiting area, opened one eye to look them over, then closed it again with a sigh. Really, his kids.

Kouji tapped his foot on the floor to get their attention. *I'll talk to Nana first, then you can come over,* he signed, before removing his shoes to enter the café. Hitoshi slumped into a chair next to Aizawa, but Izuku remained standing.

Aizawa's eyes remained closed. Izuku avoided looking in his direction. Hitoshi looked between them.

"Will one of you tell me what's going on, or do I have to make another pun?" Hitoshi asked.

Eyes still closed, Aizawa muttered, "It's up to Problem Child." His voice was low and raspy, a sign that he'd probably had to shout a lot at work. Hitoshi was pretty sure this class wouldn't reach summer break intact.

He turned to Izuku, whose face had lost all of its happy flush. "Izu?" he prompted.

His friend shrugged. A knock on the entrance startled them all.

You can come in, Kouji told them, leaning against the door. Nana had followed him, rubbing her head against his shin and leaving orange fur behind.

Aizawa sat forward, eyes fixed on the cat. Hitoshi grinned as his da—guardian stood up to enter the café, movements unhurried even though he was clearly biting back a grin. In no time at all, they were sitting in a circle inside the café, waiting for Nana to greet them.

Hitoshi spent a good few minutes petting her back while she sniffed at his sneakers. *She is smelling the other cats,* Kouji informed him. *She approves.*

Aizawa was also given the Nana Seal of Approval, conveyed by her fascination with his long hair and scarf, which she batted at with curiosity. Aizawa unearthed one of the ends of the long garment and dragged it across the floor for her to chase and "kill." Luckily, the material was strong enough not to be damaged by kitty claws, although Nana gave it her best shot.

Izuku, seated slightly further away, tried to hold off a sneeze and failed miserably. He should really start carrying around allergy pills if they kept visiting cats, he reflected. Nana came to investigate, walking into his lap to sniff at his face, tickling his cheeks with her whiskers. She mewed and shoved her nose under his jaw, purring at his surprised giggles.

She says you smell like leaves, Kouji translated.

"Like she likes your shampoo? Or maybe your hair is just bushy enough to confuse her," Hitoshi mused.

"I-I-It's probably the al-aloe," Izuku clarified. "I got-- ouch! Nana!" The cat had reached his shoulder and butted her head against the sore spot. "I, I got a bit, um, burned?"

Hitoshi looked between Izuku's downcast expression and the dark scowl on his dad's face.

"This is something that'll make me mad, isn't it."

Izuku hunched his shoulders, silently confirming it. Kouji's eyes narrowed at the two of them.

Did someone hurt you? He asked. Izuku wasn't looking, so he tapped the floor impatiently to get the other's attention. *Someone. Hurt. You?*

Izuku bit his lip. *No. A-c-c-i-d-e-n-t.* His hands jerked, before he returned them to Nana's fur,

"Kid," Aizawa said. Just that, a gentle reminder. 'I am here and I know what happened.'

"Izu, *please.*" Hitoshi leaned forward, trying to decide whether he should move closer or if Izuku would prefer not to be crowded. "I want to help."

"I-I won't say the n-n-name," Izuku said, hesitant. "He, um, he was just angry. At me and you. I-i-it's fine."

"But you're injured!" Hitoshi protested. "You're, what, burned? Was it one of the seniors again? Or, wait, it was Explodo-boy, wasn't it? I'm gonna--"

"NO!" Izuku protested. "Th-th-that'll just m-make--make--" His throat clicked. *You can't! He'll be so angry,* he signed. Nana meowed at his movement and slunk away to Kouji's lap to stay out of range of his distressed flailing.

Kouji cleared his throat, pointedly. *I used to be bullied,* he signed, smiling placidly.

"...Used to?" Hitoshi asked, eyeing the smile.

For some reason, birds kept pooping on them until they stopped. Kouji's smile widened. *So strange.*

Izuku's jaw dropped. Hitoshi whistled, impressed.

"Dude, you're like… a spiteful Disney princess," Hitoshi stated. "I appreciate that about you."

Kouji nodded magnanimously.

"So, Izu, will we be setting the birds on Explodo-Boy? Or is there someone else we should be pooping on?" Hitoshi asked. All three boys took a moment to pull a face at that phrasing. "You know what I mean, come on."

Aizawa snorted quietly, reminding them all he was there. "What have we told you about making revenge schemes, Toshi?"

Hitoshi grinned sheepishly. "Save it for when you're not listening, so you have plausible deniability. Sorry, d—Aizawa."

With one last pat to Nana's back, Aizawa stood and stretched. "I'm off for a talk. Hizashi should stop by as soon as he's done recording to fill out the adoption forms, but feel free to eat before dinner if you get hungry. Kouda, you're welcome to dinner as long as your parents say it's okay." By this point, Izuku knew to expect a light tap to his (uninjured) shoulder as the man left, but Aizawa took a moment to

ruffle his hair instead, entirely nonchalant.

“Wh- I- uh-” Izuku sputtered.

“Toshi, no more than two cups of coffee, it’s after 4,” Aizawa instructed, clasping his son on the shoulder.

“Yeah, yeah, bye.”

Lastly, Aizawa turned to the kids’ new friend, currently occupied with trying to keep Nana from chewing his jacket. *Kouda,* he signed. *Good luck.*

Mitsuki Bakugou was probably the only person on the planet who knew at first sight just how terrifying Inko Midoriya could be.

This had to do with the manner of their meeting. After all, it’s not every day that a plain, green-haired woman yanks your drink out of your hand with telekinesis, pulls your date off his seat with the other hand, and hisses, “What. The. Fuck. Did you just add to her drink, you FUCKING CREEPER?” loud enough to grab the attention of every person in the bar.

Mitsuki had never told anyone but Masaru that story, partially because Katsuki was not old enough for the concept of things being added to women’s drinks, and partially because she didn’t want to explain the warning she’d gotten from the police after stomping between the man’s legs hard enough to severely damage his chances of procreating. Inko had refused to leave her side all the way to the police station, and had somehow transitioned from a take-no-prisoners-badass to a concerned, compassionate friend on the way.

It had been years since Mitsuki had heard Inko that angry, and she was hoping that her friend had finally had the sense to dump Hisashi on his ass. She just wasn't sure why Inko had decided to leave work early to visit her, or why she'd insisted on another man being present. Best case scenario, she'd met someone else and wanted Mitsuki as bridesmaid (Masaru could help design the dresses, she had the perfect shade of green for Izuku's ring-bearer tux just in case)--

A knock on the door sounded, cutting off her train of thought. She dashed to answer it.

"Inko! It's been so long, come in, come in. Do you want tea or something to eat?" She took a moment to glance between Inko and the stranger next to her. Taking in the bloodshot eyes, the 4 o'clock stubble and the long hair pulled into a bun above an all-black outfit, she sighed internally. Not Inko's type at all. Oh, well.

"Thank you, Mitsuki. Are Masaru and Katsuki home?" Inko asked, wringing her hands anxiously. Mitsuki nodded, beckoning the two inside.

"Sure, you want to speak to them?"

"Y--"

"MASARU, KATSUKI! INKO'S AT THE DOOR!" She shouted, leading the way to the kitchen.

"FINE, I'M COMING, OLD HAG!" her brat yelled back.

"RESPECT YOUR MOM, YOU LITTLE SHIT," she called, and chuckled

at the sound of tiny explosions from his room. Kids. So fun to mess with. He was just like her at that age. Mitsuki turned back to her guests. “So? Why the visit, Inko?”

Inko was already sitting, face twisted in an anxious grimace. The stranger stood near the other open chair, apparently waiting for everyone to arrive.

“And who are you again?” she asked, unable to rein in her curiosity.

He raised an eyebrow, and turned slightly to watch Katsuki stomp in, hands shoved in his pockets.

“My name is Shouta Aizawa. I work in the pro hero field,” he said. Mitsuki saw her boy’s head prick up like a dog who’d scented a cat. “You may have met my son, Bakugou-kun. His name is Hitoshi Shinsou.”

“YOU’RE THAT PURPLE FUCK’S DAD?” Katsuki erupted, pointing at him in disbelief. Mitsuki smacked a hand against her forehead and slapped the other against the back of his head.

“Watch your fucking language, Katsuki,” she groaned. Aizawa looked between the two of them, eyes narrowed.

“Do you know why I am here, Bakugou-kun?” he asked, voice deadly soft. Mitsuki’s boy scowled but shook his head.

Masaru chose that moment to walk in, rubbing at his eyes. He’d probably been napping in his office again. “What’s all this noise about?” he asked blearily.

“Your son,” Aizawa growled, “has recently threatened my son, and attacked Inko’s.” Mitsuki turned to Inko, hoping she would somehow deny it, but her friend looked up to meet her eyes and nodded.

Fuck.

Shouta hadn’t expected a very favorable reaction from meeting the Bakugous. No one liked to hear their precious angel was a bully, after all.

Still, this had been outside of his expectations.

Mitsuki Bakugou rounded on her son, scowling. “Did you fucking hurt Izuku?”

Her son scowled back, “The little fuck deserved it! He got his *boyfriend* to--”

“Do not finish that sentence,” Shouta interrupted. Inko shifted beside him, but stayed silent. She’d agreed to save her comments for last when they’d planned this out.

“I know that by now, Izuku has sent you the video,” he continued, staring at the boy who scowled back. “You are aware that it has no connection to you.”

“Those little fucks still--”

“Used a quirk in self-defense to keep you from kicking Izuku, who was on the ground after you pushed them.” Shouta refused to let the boy control the narrative here. His parents were both looking at their son with-- resignation? They weren’t even surprised?

“I am aware,” Shouta continued, “that you threatened to go to the police and accuse my son of misusing his quirk, in order to ruin his future.” He smiled, slowly. “I regret to inform you that my husband and I are well-connected with the police force in Musutafu, including a detective with a truth-detecting quirk. You may feel free to go visit him, at which point he will inform you of the same thing I am telling you now. The use of a quirk in self-defense or defense of another that leaves no permanent damage to the attacker is perfectly legal, especially in minors.” His smile sharpened.

“On the other hand, quirks used to intimidate, threaten or *injure*,” he stressed, “may be recorded as ‘first offenses.’ Especially if the victim does not retaliate, *or have a quirk of their own*.”

With satisfaction, he watched the color drain from the boy’s face as he processed that. Before the shock could turn into anger, he pulled out a chair and sat next to Inko, who had pressed her hands so tightly they were shaking. Shouta gestured at the remaining seats pointedly.

“Sit down. And if you can, convince me why I should not report you for the same offense of which you accused my son.” He smirked internally at the thought that Hizashi, had he been here, would have called his last phrase a ‘mic drop.’

Inko sat in silence as Katsuki's angry words petered out and fear began to shine through. Aizawa had sat impassive through it all. As the boy she'd sometimes thought of as another son gulped, Aizawa raised an eyebrow and leaned forward.

"You want to be a hero, that's your justification?" At the boy's nod, Aizawa frowned. "Do you even know what a hero's primary function is?"

"You fuckin' fight villains and win," Katsuki grumbled, fidgeting in his chair. He'd done that as a child when he and Izuku had dropped one of her nice plates and tried to hide the pieces so she wouldn't know. Looking at him, she still couldn't believe he'd intentionally hurt her baby. What happened to the boy who used to drag Izuku around by the hand to show him beetles in the park?

"Wrong." Aizawa looked disappointed but not surprised. "If a hero has to choose between defeating a villain and protecting a civilian, their primary duty is to protect. To *protect*, not to *attack*. That is what separates us from villains." Inko noted the 'us.'

Aizawa folded his arms, staring the Bakugous down. "Heroes have no need for strength if that strength is not used to protect. The *only* reason that this conversation is being held here and not in front of your principal or the police, is that Izuku argued for leniency. He, at least, still believes you can be a great hero."

Katsuki's face spasmed as if he wanted to say something, but at a glare from his father, he quieted down.

"I am very sorry for what the brat's done," Mitsuki said, bowing in her seat. "But please, do not take his dream away from him. I- I *know* he can be better than this."

Aizawa turned to Inko, expectantly. Her turn, then.

“We, we’ve talked it over,” she began, voice soft. “As long as Katsuki does not approach Izuku or Hitoshi-kun for the rest of the year, he will not be punished. And, after summer break, I will have Izuku transferred from Katsuki’s class.” She sighed heavily. How had it come to this?

“Katsuki.” For the first time since she’d arrived, her friend’s son met her eyes. In his face, she read embarrassment, shame, fear and, she hoped, regret. He looked away immediately. “I don’t understand… why you would try to hurt Izuku. Even after you two stopped playing together, my boy would always say… how amazing you were. How hard you were working to be a hero. He, he admired you so much.” The words she’d agonized over throughout the day, planning on the train and during downtime at work, suddenly flowed.

“I don’t understand why you would try to hurt someone who looks up to you so much. Who has always, *always* wanted the best for you. I know my boy. I know he will forgive you for this. For whatever else you’ve done to him over the years.” Her voice wavered with tears she would not let fall. “He will forgive you if you show an ounce of regret.”

Katsuki bit his lip but continued to glare at the floor.

“He may forgive you, but I will not.”

At that, Mitsuki, Masaru and Katsuki all stared at her. At the sudden iron in her tone.

“You will leave my boy and Hitoshi-kun alone, Katsuki. You will leave every other student you even think of hurting alone. Because if you ever prove that you cannot refrain from hurting someone because you *feel like it*… I will not let Izuku’s kindness keep me from reporting you.” Tired, she was so tired, at the look of fright on Mitsuki’s face, the frustration on Masaru’s. The shaking of Katsuki’s shoulders. Even though she knew it was necessary, she felt like a monster for aiming her words at the chinks in the boy’s armor. Fourteen, he was only fourteen.

But her baby wasn’t even that old yet. And she had to protect him.

“If you can’t treat my boy how he deserves, stay away from him,” she whispered. “I know you’re a smart boy, Katsuki. You should know you won’t like the consequences if you don’t.”

She looked to Aizawa, checking that he had nothing more to say.

“Masaru, Mitsuki. I am sorry to intrude on you like this. Please forgive me.” She stood, bowed, and turned to leave.

“Inko!”

Her friend’s voice was quiet, more quiet than she’d ever heard it. She turned back.

“I’m so sorry.” Mitsuki said, hushed. “Let Izuku know, alright? I’m sorry…”

Inko nodded, offered a weak smile, and left. Aizawa leveled a glance at the family, nodded, and followed her out.

Only long acquaintance with Izuku prepared him to shepherd her back to her apartment as her eyes blurred with tears. As he left, she tried to take comfort in his last words. “You did well in there.” And “Don’t worry, Hitoshi was already plotting revenge when I left.”

If he had to lose the closest friend he’d had since childhood, Inko was at least glad he’d managed to meet a precious friend like Hitoshi-kun.

Hitoshi glanced at Kouji as Izuku excused himself to grab tissues from the bathroom. He really needed to carry Benadryl more often.

“So you can really get birds to harass Baka-gou if I give you a picture?” he whispered.

Kouji nodded. *Crows are good at facial recognition. They’re great at stealing things, too.*

“And the best part is, he won’t have any reason to connect it to us,” Hitoshi gloated. “Thank you, Kouji. Seriously, you’re the best Disney princess scheming partner I could have wished for.”

You’re damn right, Kouji returned, before glancing up at Izuku’s return. *Izuku, may I offer you a cat in this trying time?*

When Izuku was finally too occupied with keeping Nana from chewing his hair to look suspicious at them, Hitoshi and Kouji exchanged a grin. They could tell this was the beginning of a beautiful

friendship.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is kind of a mess, it's hella long and switches POV every minute, but I wanted to keep track of Izuku, Hitoshi and Kouji while the Talk was happening. Otherwise it would have been straight angsty tension and I'm not about that.

notes:

I have been waiting weeks to use "silence so thick you can hear a pun drop" and I finally got to!

If you have never been blessed to have a friend with a weird laugh, it is the absolute best. Kouji's is based on a friend of mine who used to describe her laughter (very accurately) as "drunken squirrel sounds."

Spiteful Disney Princess Kouji is inspired by the attacking princesses in... shrek two, I think? Shrek 3. AKA the absolute best (brief) use of Immigrant Song in a film until Thor Ragnarok came along. For your viewing pleasure: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_wZlHI8HhE

Also this: https://i.pinimg.com/originals/d3/44/1a/d3441a136110f0a4b907a79f9e8cc0e3.jpg

I have no idea how many toes cats have and at this point I'm too afraid to ask.

Inko Midoriya using her quirk in a 'heroic' way and meeting Mitsuki has been my secret headcanon forEVER, I just hope it doesn't come off as OOC.

Sweet jesus, I just realized the title is a pun. My brain is way too nice to me sometimes.

Talk Show Thursday

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The intro music chimed as Izuku bent over his homework, one hand on his pencil and the other on Nana. She'd claimed his lap as her territory, as she did every time he came over to the Aizawa-Yamada household. *You are Pillow*, Kouji had said, and refused to explain further when he asked.

"Gooooooooooooooooooood evening, listeners! This is Present Mic--"

"--And Gigabyte--"

"--And we're about to start the talk show portion of our Talk Show Thursday!"

"It's Friday."

"Don't rain on my parade, Giga, I started these on a Thursday and therefore every talk show we do is still spiritually a Thursday." Present Mic's laughter rang loud and long, over the sounds of his co-host's muffled sigh. Izuku had always liked Gigabyte, they seemed very down to earth compared to Present Mic's, well, drama. "Awwwwwww~ Listeners, Giga just called me their older brother in sign language!"

"Keep telling yourself that, Prez. Now, this week we're going over an old topic in a new way. We've done some talks on bullying in the past, both what Prez and I experienced, and the experiences you guys called in to talk about. Today, however, we're going to ask for the other side

of the story. Prez?"

"Sure, Giga. So, I can't take full credit for the idea behind this-- that was one of the young'uns at the station--"

Hitoshi glanced up from his seat on the floor, dragging a feathered lure for Sombra and Luna. Izuku nodded at him.

"You can just call them interns, Prez," Giga interjected, voice amused.

"One of the *young'uns* suggested we ask people to call in about a time that you used your words, your quirk, or other methods, maybe online, maybe in person, to put down another person. We'd like to know what you did, what age you were, what was going through your head and, hopefully, what prompted you to stop. Our opening question WILL BE-- drumroll please, Giga--" Present Mic's voice dropped low over the sound of Gigabyte thumping their hands against the table. "--IF you could talk to your younger self, what would you say?"

Gigabyte added, "Standard talk show rules apply, by the way-- remember that this is a live radio show and censor your language accordingly. Parents, if you're listening as a family and a bad word pops up, please cover your kiddo's ears and screech loudly for 3 to 4 seconds. If you admit to a crime while we're on the line, please stay on the phone long enough for us to track your location for the police. And without further ado-- We're going on an ad break, so get dialing!"

Izuku reached over to turn down the radio, debating whether or not he wanted to turn it off before the next segment aired. It had seemed like a good idea at the time, when Yamada had mentioned doing another unit on his show about bullying. Not that he hadn't done several before, each time focusing on things like quirk discrimination, discrimination against appearance/mutation quirks, etc. Izuku hadn't

really wanted him to do a show on quirkless harassment, though. It wasn't that he didn't think talks like that were valuable-- because they were! They definitely helped raise awareness, which was good! It was just…

He set down his pencil and sighed.

It was just, after a week of sitting on tenterhooks in class and at home, catching Mom's tearful glances and the silent, seething looks of hate from Ka--Bakugou, he didn't want another reminder of how much it sucked to be quirkless. So when Yamada asked, he'd stuttered out something about maybe asking former bullies to come forward and talk about what helped them change their behavior. He knew Bakugou listened to Present Mic's talk shows too sometimes, so it might actually be helpful to him.

He'd suggested that Yamada avoid *calling* them bullies, too. People were more likely to be honest about what they'd done if they weren't trying to reject the label. At least, he thought so, anyway.

But it could still be really… awkward? To listen to a lot of people like Kacchan talking about how they made the lives of people like him hell. So maybe he'd save it for another day. Except that he was already here with Hitoshi and they normally listened to the show on Fridays and what if Yamada felt hurt that Izuku hadn't listened after he specifically--

"You gotta let the hamster off the wheel, I think it's getting tired," Hitoshi suggested. Izuku blinked.

He turned to Hitoshi and squinted. "H-hamster?"

"You know--" Hitoshi raised a finger by his temple and spun it a few

times. “When your brain starts going like a hamster wheel. All one track.”

Izuku huffed. It was somewhat accurate, maybe. But he wouldn’t admit it.

“Aizawa likes to tell Aunt Nemu that when she gets worried. Well, actually he goes, ‘The wheel’s still turning but the hamster’s dead,’ and then she tries to kill him, but it’s the same concept.” Hitoshi grinned. “So what’s got you so worried?”

Izuku bit his lip, bringing a hand up to his chin. Nana intercepted with a paw and pulled it back down.

“I-I’m worried about--” Kacchan, and how he’d spent the last week hunched over his notes, silent and sullen. The look on his mom’s face when she asked if anything like this had happened before and he dropped his eyes and shook his head. The way Yamada had asked to see his shoulder and scowled at the red, scalded skin. The way Aunt Mitsuki had dropped by with a store-bought cake and bowed to him, telling him to ‘wallop her brat a good one if he tried again.’ The crows that had kept trying to steal Kacchan’s hat and backpack, and the way Hitoshi had laughed about them. “I-- I shouldn’t have told.”

“Told what? That you were bullied?” Hitoshi dangled the lure in front of Sombra’s face, swinging it in gentle circles.

“Y-yeah.” He sighed. “E-everyone’s *angry*.”

And pitying. And protective, and vindictive, and *disappointed* he didn’t tell sooner. Or didn’t tell them directly. Or wouldn’t tell them exactly who had done what over the years since fifth grade-- which, he didn’t even remember all of what had happened anymore!

And half of the time, it wasn't Ka-- *Bakugou,* or his friends, it was someone else who wanted them to think they were funny or cool or strong. It was hardly ever *about* him, it was just aimed *at* him most of the time.

At useless, quirkless Deku who wouldn't try to fight back unless you were picking on someone else. Wasn't it at least partly his fault for making himself a target in the first place?

"So you did what you were supposed to do and things were supposed to get better, and you're supposed to *feel* better but instead you feel worse?" Hitoshi hazarded, glancing up.

That wasn't *quite* it, but it was close enough. Izuku nodded.

Hitoshi sighed. "Can I ask… is there anything I've done to make it worse?"

Showing up at his classroom door every day to glare his classmates into submission. Laughing at Kacchan, who hated to be laughed at more than anything in the world, even *Deku.*

And Izuku had his suspicions about the crows.

He lifted a shoulder and focused on petting Nana.

Hitoshi grimaced. "Should I… I can have Kouji, um. Call off the birds?"

Izuku nodded.

“Aaaand, I can… ignore Baka-gou from now on? Unless he starts something, I mean.”

“B-Bakugou,” Izuku corrected, a low murmur.

Hitoshi sighed. “Fine, *Bakugou.* But I reserve the right to use that name if he keeps calling you Deku!”

Izuku frowned at him.

“You know, you and your Mom have the same, like, Face of Disappointment?” Hitoshi said, tossing the cat toy to the ground as he stretched. “It’s like, half ‘How could you do this to me I thought you were better than that’ and half ‘You will never do this again or *so help me*.’”

Izuku frowned harder.

“See, *now* it just looks like you’re pouting.” Hitoshi stood up and grinned. “Come on, turn the volume up, it’s re-starting.”

Conceding that that was all he was going to get, Izuku turned the radio volume back up.

“AAAAAAAAAAaaand our first caller, Ms. Ijiwaru from Sapporo, you are on air!” Present Mic sang out.

“You know,” said Hitoshi, settling next to Izuku and reopening his English textbook, “when he said the ‘youngun in the studio?’ That’s what he always called me as a kid. Superhero secrecy stuff, he can’t announce he’s adopted a kid, so it was always ‘one of the young’uns in the studio taught me how to meme!’ and all that.”

Izuku had figured that out, actually, after years of assuming that Present Mic either hired interns straight from high school or helped babysit for his coworkers. Still. It was something a little special. Yamada had called him the same thing he called his son.

He nudged his elbow sideways, bumping gently into Hitoshi’s arm. His friend bumped him back and settled in to listen.

Gigabyte shut off their mike and leaned back, groaning as they stretched. “Ugggggghhh… That was a good show but god *damn* people can be shitty sometimes,” they griped, scruffing a hand through their hair.

“Good job keeping that in all show,” Present Mic teased. “To be fair--some of them seemed pretty decent. That one kid even apologized after graduation. But what really got me was the 20 year old who blackmailed *other* people to bully for him. Now that’s cold. And actually, kind of villainous?”

“He’s a psychologist,” Gigabyte deadpanned. “That’s the next best thing.”

Present Mic pursed his lips but didn’t argue. “You think we’ll ever get

a call from our old schools? I was kinda waiting for one of them to go, 'yeah, I used to lock this weird loud kid into the band room after school until he learned to scream loud enough to break glass.'" And how to pick locks, but that was beside the point.

Gigabyte snorted. "Yeah, nah. I used to smack people with gel pens and make their faces sparkle until they left me alone. Nobody wants to confess to deserving *that*." They frowned. "Anyway, is "Young'un" okay? You normally only set these up when something happens."

Present Mic made a face. "I'm predictable that way, huh. And no, it was his friend this time."

"Oh!" Gigabyte clapped, remembering. "The little green dude? Reina says you brought him by while I had a day off. I wanted to meet him too! What's he like, another snarky munchkin like Hitoshi?" They were three inches taller than Hitoshi and enjoyed lording it over him.

Their coworker laughed. "Just like, imagine if a sunflower and a puppy somehow had a baby and the baby was a teenager."

Gigabyte raised a hand, concentrating. Lines of ink streamed down their arms, coalescing into a cartoon of a green dog with a ruff of golden petals. "Like this?"

Present Mic, as always, raised his phone to take a picture. He was good at that, making them feel their quirk was awesome. Most of the time people thought they should 'tone it down,' as if living, moving tattoos weren't the coolest shit ever. So what if they could never enter an onsen, being able to use their quirk without having to break out their pen pack was worth it.

"Okay, now imagine the sunflower puppy as a very small human,"

Present Mic instructed, laughing as they huffed a sigh. They were terrible at ‘animating’ people. They waved an arm and ‘banished’ the ink back to where they normally kept it, rainbow bands of color around each bicep.

“I’ll wait to meet him.” They poked his shoulder. “You WILL bring him again?”

Present Mic dodged another poke and nodded, laughing boisterously. “Couldn’t keep him away, the kid loves heroes and quirks. You’d better get prepared for a million questions on how your quirk functions.”

He checked his phone, batting their hand aside when they went to poke him again. Still, they took a second to transfer a neon green ‘Bring SunFlower Kid to Work” reminder onto the back of Present Mic’s hand while he was distracted.

It was gel-pen, it would wash off.

In a day or two.

They snickered.

“What did-- oh. Really?” Present Mic sighed, used to their method of leaving reminders by now. “I would have remembered anyway, you know.”

They shrugged, still grinning. “Say hi to Munchkin the first and Munchkin the second for me.” Flicking a peace sign at their co-host, they shouldered their bag and headed out.

Present Mic shook his head and turned back to his phone. '*Be home soon,'* he texted, '*We can talk high-school choice forms then.'*

Shouta texted back a thumbs-up emoji.

Not to be outdone, Hitoshi texted a cat emoji.

Present Mic turned off the screen before he could be caught in another emoji war, locking his arms behind his head to stretch. Hard to believe that the silent, scrawny kid Shouta brought home from an undercover mission had grown so quickly into his confident kid, ready to apply to high schools, making friends with sweet kids like Midoriya and Kouda. He was so proud he could burst.

He even waited until he was on the train to start spamming the Family group chat. He'd never lost an emoji war yet and he wouldn't start now.

In a dark room in an abandoned building, a man turned off the radio and smiled. A pro hero, asking for people to talk about *villainous behavior* as if it were normal on public broadcast? Now that was… interesting.

Chapter End Notes

> This is a transition chapter, but if anyone remembers the forms from episode 1, you might have a clue of what I'm transitioning to. :D (We're just going to pretend that Izuku's school does their 'high school choice' forms way late because I totally forgot about time transitions and then went back to figure out when All Might meets Small Might and uh. They just meet a couple months later in this universe, I guess.)

This is the 'sign' Giga sends Present Mic in the intro: http://hs84.blog.jp/archives/696480.html
That is the actual, literal sign for 'older brother' in Japanese. I find it absolutely hilarious.

The idea for the show (asking former bullies why they did it) came from this NPR talk: https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=125065190 It's an interesting read, but they start out talking about suicides prompted by bullying so be warned before you read. Interestingly enough, multiple "former bullies" did report they grew up to be psychologists.

Gigabyte (real name Niji Ito) is an OC because talk shows usually include more than one person and also I felt like it? Their quirk is Irezumi, and they can manipulate ink on skin. They started out with doodling on hands/arms as a kid, figured out they could transfer ink to make designs on other people around the time they started getting bullied, and finally just got tattoos to be able to use it all the time when they were 18. They are not allowed in onsen because Japanese public baths don't allow people with tattoos, a remnant of the times when only yakuza had them. Any baths that do allow tattoos are apparently still frequented by yakuza (and, I guess, tourists with tattoos).

Some day people will realize that I introduce new characters in order to give the boyos new nicknames and when that happens I will have to find a different trope.

Sometime in the future probably:
Hitoshi: Izuku "Izu" "Plant Kid" "Fluffles" "Pillow" "Sunflower Kid" Midoriya. WHAT did you do to your hair?

Rescue

Chapter Notes

> Warnings for: somewhat graphic description of choking, to avoid reading that section skip down from 'was swallowed whole' to the line break '--------'

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Later, Izuku would be forced to piece together his recollections of that afternoon like the shards of a dropped glass, shattered memories of fear and pain and dagger-sharp slivers of moments that woke him gasping and coughing in the middle of the night.

The class, raucous as the teacher announced, “You’re all planning to go to hero schools, right?”

And moments later, their jeering as he remarked gleefully, “That’s right, Bakugou and Midoriya are both applying to UA.”

Noburu cornering him after class, long fingers snatching his notebook. “Still dreaming of being a *hero*, Deku? You should have thought better before whining to your mom about Bakugou. Stop trying to drag the *real* heroes down with you!”

Katsuki letting out a huff behind them, walking away without looking back. Tsubasa and Noburu scrambling to follow him, although Noburu took a moment to lean in and whisper, “Maybe you’d be better off just jumping off the roof, huh? Pray to be born again as someone who isn’t *worthless.*”

Izuku watching through tear-blurred eyes as the bully tossed his notebook out the window and shoved him into a desk on his way out.

Hitoshi finding him next to the pond with his sopping wet notebook in his hands, biting back a swear-word as he slung an arm around Izuku's shoulder to steer him home, babbling about finding a hair-dryer to save the pages they could and how he hoped Izuku hadn't been writing in erasable pen because one time he had to dry off his homework and all of the ink disappeared with the heat.

But even if everything else blurred in his mind, he would never forget the moment Hitoshi's grin faltered and died as a voice addressed them from the tunnel they passed, the way his friend stood tense and silent as a man made of grey-ish green slime oozed towards them. The sick, swooping horror in the pit of his stomach as the *villain* drew closer. His hands, cold and shaking with fear, Hitoshi's grip on his shoulder tighter and tighter every second. A single thought, cold and bleak, *we could die here*.

That last, desperate choked cry of "IZU!" as he found the strength to shove his friend behind him and was swallowed whole.

Sickly-warm heat pressing against him, surrounding him, reaching towards his mouth as he convulsed, caught between screaming for help and conserving the last of his breath. The ooze that would kill him undulating with *laughter* as the villain remarked on exactly how long he had to live, counting down the seconds.

Hitoshi's screaming, "LET HIM GO, YOU BASTARD! LET HIM THE FUCK GO RIGHT FUCKING NOW!" becoming watery and indistinct as starbursts bloomed against his shut eyelids, his brain firing desperately as he ran out of oxygen. The urge to vomit growing as his mouth gaped open and his last breath was stolen from his lungs. Pain exploding even as he curled fruitlessly inward, trying to cough, failing. *Dying*.

Blackness.

Hitoshi had always liked that his quirk wasn't all-powerful. A real villain's quirk would be instant, would catch you unawares, he'd thought. His required a *response*, which was almost, *almost* like consent. It was simple to avoid being caught, all you had to do was *not respond*. He'd always been grateful that there was a limitation like that to the quirk that scared everyone around him.

He'd been screaming at the *bastard* killing his friend for what felt like years, even as his shaking hand reached his phone to send an emergency alert to his dads. He'd stayed out of reach, just like they told him, he'd searched the surrounding area for any possible weapons or people to call for help, he'd tried and tried to get the *fucking murderous asshole* to stop *killing his friend and fucking talk to him*.

Izuku had stopped thrashing and fallen still. The bastard was *laughing* as he turned to Hitoshi. From the tunnel came a loud clatter.

"Run along, *little boy,* I have what I--"

"**LET MY FRIEND GO!"** Hitoshi shrieked. The ooze collapsed, eyeballs blank within the amorphous blob. Izuku, uncovered, toppled forward into Hitoshi's desperate embrace. CPR, CPR, he needed to clear the airways first since Izuku was unresponsive and *not breathing, his friend wasn't breathing--*

"I AM HERE!" shouted the tunnel in All Might's voice. Hitoshi ignored it, tilting Izuku's chin up as he frantically swiped ooze from his mouth, bent to give the first rescue breaths. He was so fucking glad Aizawa had listened when he asked to be certified in first aid.

“My boy, my thanks on subduing the villain! I shall call the ambulance!” fucking *All Might* said.

Hitoshi sat back to start the compressions, counting to thirty under his breath, hands pressing to the beat of “Staying Alive.” Yamadad made sure he knew that trick.

His dads would be here soon, they’d bring the cavalry, they’d bring the fucking Self Defense Force if they had to, he just had to make sure his friend was breathing.

Two rescue breaths. All Might was putting the slime villain in a fucking soda bottle.

Compressions. Izuku’s ribs felt like slim branches under his hands, he was afraid to crack them as he continued to make his heart beat.

Thirty. He raised Izuku’s chin again, and felt his own heart stop as Izuku *coughed.* His eyes opened, teary, terrified. Hitoshi bent to raise him up, rubbing his back as he choked and gagged and spat out green slime and bile. He coughed, harsh and wet, but he was *breathing.*

“H-H-Hicchan,” Izuku sobbed. “Y-y-y-you *saved me*.”

Fuck All Might, fuck Slime Man, fuck the bastard that threw Izuku’s notebook in the pond, fuck Bakugou and Aldera middle school and every single asshole in their motherfucking city.

Hitoshi wrapped Izuku in a careful hug, trembling with shock and fear and bone-deep relief. Izuku shook just as hard, grabbed his jacket with a desperate grip, buried his face in Hitoshi’s shoulder.

Behind him, All Might coughed.

“Ah, are you alright, my boy?”

Chapter End Notes

I nearly cried writing this chapter, hoping that means I did an okay job of it. Hitoshi was there to meet Unnamed Slime Villain because he refused to be elsewhere, Izuku pushed him out of the way because of course he did, Hitoshi did CPR because you can't just *slap a drowning victim awake* ALL MIGHT.

Also Noburu was the one to harass Izuku because (personal experience) if you get adults to deal with ONE bully, their friends take that as an excuse to target you for revenge.

Anyway! I hope you like the chapter and Izuku has now (almost) met All Might, so we're approaching canon!

EDIT: I have been seeing a lot of anger at All Might in the comments, which, valid, but there are in fact reasons for his behavior in this chapter. Mainly: he is a hero coming onto the scene with a temporarily defeated but unsecured villain, and a kid in the process of performing *competent* first aid to another kid. As a hero, his priority is to protect the vulnerable people from the villain, not to interrupt someone performing CPR. He secures the villain, then lets the victims know he is calling an ambulance and stays out of the way.

Canon! All Might def. should have checked on Midoriya's breathing and called for paramedics just in case but that's another story.

Meet Your Heroes

Chapter Notes

> This chapter has art now!!! All hail the amazing Nonbinari_Goat for drawing the end notes Sneak Peek, I am agog and aghast, it's extremely awesome :DDD Check it out at the link below:
>
> https://nonbinari-goat.tumblr.com/post/186843830226/so-anyways

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sometimes Toshinori thought that All For One had stolen something vital from him, when he struck that final blow. Something more vital than the, well, several internal organs and portion of his lung that had been irreparably damaged. Something at the very heart of him that grew more cracked and bitter and brittle with each grin he faked as he choked down the taste of blood.

As he ran through the sewer system, he could feel the pervasive ache spreading from where it lived in his side, throbbing in time with his heart. All Might, the family-friendly number one hero, could not swear under his breath as he covered his mouth with the collar of his shirt and ricocheted from wall to wall. (Chiyo would kill him if he came down with another respiratory infection, and whatever was flowing at the foot of this tunnel, he didn't want it on his last clean pair of jeans.) So he definitely wasn't muttering "shitshitshitshitshit" as he bounded through *another* grimy tunnel.

Finally, he saw the partially-opened sewer cover coated in slime (different slime, person slime, not… well, whatever) and pushed off, knocking it aside as he leaped into the upper… tunnel? Huh. "I AM HERE," he boomed.

Blinking away the brief sun-blindness, Toshinori turned to the light, just in time to see the villain collapse, releasing a child as he did so. Another he hadn't noticed leaped forward to catch him, pulling him away from the slowly-spreading puddle of villain Toshinori had been

chasing. The kid's head lolled against his friend's shoulder as they both collapsed.

Fuck.

He'd only seen people fall like that when…

Forcing down a bitterness that had nothing to do with the salt-and-copper tang in his mouth, All Might grinned and cried, "My boy, my thanks on subduing the villain! I shall call the ambulance!" Not that it would help much if the kid didn't start breathing soon, but his friend was already starting CPR, visibly forcing himself to stay calm and collected. Toshinori probably wouldn't have been able to do the same at that age.

Toshinori dialed 119 and checked his phone for the nearest street. After confirming the address, he described where to find the boys-- still attempting resuscitation, he murmured, gravel-voiced-- and resigned himself to waiting until he heard sirens to make his escape turn the villain in.

The boy still wasn't breathing. Toshinori studied what he could see of his face as he rummaged in his bag for-- ah, yes, soda bottle. He couldn't see much more than grime-soaked green curls and the round curve of a very freckled cheek, but it was enough to estimate the boy's age. Too damn young.

He scraped the villain into the bottle-- the eyes and whatever else would fit, actually. From police reports about the petty thief-turned-murderer, all of the "ooze" except the eyes lost mobility once disconnected.

He should have gotten here sooner.

All Might straightened up, turning as he heard a choked cough. His eyes widened.

The green-haired kid, the one he'd thought was a goner, curled over and gagged, gasping. *Breathing*.

Toshinori felt a suspicious prickle in his eyes but forced it down behind another smile. Nearly too late, he'd been nearly too late to save this child-- and even then, another child had had to do the bulk of the saving.

Gran Torino would have made him train until he vomited for that. If the old man ever spoke to him again.

Pocketing the soda bottle, All Might strode forward, stopping in front of the huddle of sobbing, *breathing* boys. Choking down a cough, he grinned.

"Ah, are you alright, my boy?"

As one, the boys turned to face him, eyes wide. He noticed the purple-haired kid's expression sour as he regarded him, but the green-haired kid's eyes went the widest he'd ever seen on someone over the age of three.

"A-A-A-A-ALL MIGHT!!" he shrieked, scrambling to stand up. His friend grabbed his arm to steady him as he almost fell over.

"Take it easy, Izu, breathe slow." The friend's tone was kind, gentle

even, but Toshinori didn't think he was imagining the spark of rage in his eyes. 'Where were you?' That was the way it tended to go when victims had to save themselves. 'Where were you when I was in danger, and how *dare* you show up now that it's over.' He braced himself for the shouting, the blame. He deserved it.

"B-b-b-but! A-All Might!" The green haired kid coughed again, breathing somewhat ragged. He turned to his friend to sign something desperately, too fast for Toshinori to try and read. He'd only ever learned the basic signs, anyway.

"He's asking-- really, Izu?--" the purple-haired boy sighed. "He wants you to sign his notebook."

The kid nodded rapidly, starry-eyed despite his slight wheeze and the tracks of tears cutting a path through the grime on his face. It was… unfairly cute.

"Okay, kid, but the ambulance is on its way. Why don't you sit down to wait and I'll sign," he bargained, gaining a look of reluctant approval from the purple kid. For some reason, it reminded him of another hero who had perfected the 'I guess you're not an idiot *all* the time' glance.

The kid sat, but continued to thrum with energy. All Might's grin widened as he signed the notebook-- although he rarely did appearances just for publicity nowadays, he did enjoy interacting with the younger fans.

Sirens sounded, approaching. He finished his signature with a flourish, handing the notebook back. "Here you are! Now I shall bring this villain to justice!"

He crouched, as the kid began waving his hands frantically.

“W-w-w-wait!”

Deep breath as he tensed to spring.

“P-please!”

A sudden, desperate grip on his pant leg as he leaped at 100% power.

Shrill screaming from around the level of his knee.

As he soared through the air, he was pretty sure he could hear the purple-haired kid cry out, “WHAT THE FUCK, IZU!” in the distance.

“A hero without a plan can very quickly become a dead hero,” Aizawa had told him once. “Although things may not go to plan, it is important to think through your actions before you take them. Some heroes may say that they’re better at ‘improvising’ or prefer to ‘wing it,’ but that is mainly laziness, arrogance and stupidity. Have a plan for when it goes well, have a plan for when it goes wrong, but don’t *ever* approach a dangerous situation without forethought. That is a very easy way to die.”

Izuku was pretty sure Aizawa would be disappointed with him, with his second impulsive action of the day (although he didn’t, couldn’t regret pushing Hitoshi out of the way). The first one had been, maybe justifiable-- Hitoshi had a quirk to stop the villain and he didn’t, it made sense that Izuku should be the one to be attacked first.

“Justifying an act with logic after you’ve taken it is just another kind of excuse,” Aizawa would say.

Well, that was fine, because his current situation could not be logically explained at all. Jumping on the number one hero’s pant leg as he rocketed into the sky? Having to plead with him not to shake him off like a bug?

Aizawa and his mom would take turns grounding him for the rest of the year. The rest of his *life*.

Still, it brought him here, to this rooftop, with his hero. Because he had a question burning on his tongue, and no other opportunity to ask it.

“A-A-All Might. I. I want to be a hero.” He gulped, squeezed his eyes tight shut. “I-I-I’m quirkless. A-And I know it-- People h-have always said I c-can't do a-a-anything. But even so!” He gripped the bottom of his shirt (sticky, wet, ew, gross, he must look terrible in front of All Might, no time to think of that now). “Even so, I want to be a hero! C-can I... become a hero like you?”

He winced in the ringing silence and looked up. His eyes popped at the sight of a rail-thin blond man enveloped in a cloud of steam.

“Wh-wh-wh-WHAT?!”

Shouta parked hastily behind the ambulance and ran towards his son’s location pin, fear curdling in his chest.

Hitoshi (alive, uninjured, thank god) was pacing next to a group of paramedics, listing what sounded like symptoms. Izuku was nowhere to be seen.

He heard the tail end of “--and then he fucking started flying and Izuku was hanging on! I don’t know where the fuck he was going, but he has my FUCKING FRIEND!”

Shouta slowed to a halt, clasping Hitoshi’s shoulder. Safe, at least one of his kids was safe, he had to hold on to that. “What happened, Toshi. Where’s Izuku?”

Hitoshi ran a trembling hand through his hair. “A villain attacked, Izu stopped breathing, I gave him CPR, fucking ALL MIGHT jumped in out of nowhere, signed his notebook and STOLE IZUKU.”

Shouta’s eyes burned as his hair rose, an inky black corona. Rage pulled a growl from the pit of his chest.

“He. Did. WHAT?!”

Chapter End Notes

Kind of a transitional chapter, but it would have ended up way, way long if I didn't cut it off here. Insight into All Might/ Toshinori's thought process, a brief view of Izuku and Hitoshi meeting the number one hero, and Shouta's reaction to the sort-of kidnapping.

You have no idea how tempted I was to have Hitoshi say "AND THEN HE YEETED INTO THE SUNSET WITH MY FRIEND" but, people don't tend to meme when they're very upset.

Sneak peek of later chapter(s):

Shinsou: (-_-✿)
Shinsou: (Ꝋ_Ꝋ✿) “What did you just say bout Izu”
Shinsou: (ꝊꝊ)ノ✿ “Hold my flower”
Izuku: (。-_-。) "please no"
Shinsou: (ꝊꝊ)ノ✿ “Take the flower Izu”
Izuku: ✿ \(。-_-。) “i have your flower, just please don’t kill anyone”

Aizawa: (-_-✿)
Yamada: (-_-✿)
Kouji:(-_-✿)

All three: (Ꝋ_Ꝋ✿) “WHAT did you just say bout Izu”

some time later:

Izuku: (TT_TT)ノ✿✿✿✿ "What am I supposed to do with all these flowers???"

Reality

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Every summer until Izuku was seven, Mom would bundle up his All Might action figures and comics, her Grandmother's quilt and all their photo albums and take them both to Shizuoka to see his Gramps. They'd spend days walking the neighborhood, slow enough that Izuku's short legs and Gramps's cane were in perpetual danger of colliding. At night, they'd bring out the photo albums and Izuku would gaze silently between the grinning young man twirling his blue-skinned wife on their wedding day and the laugh-lines carved in Gramps's face as he brushed away tears. It always felt like a mental shift, like looking at a picture of a duck and then finally seeing a rabbit, when he finally could look at Gramps and see the traces of that jubilant man hiding under the burden of lonely years.

Looking at this man, at All Might, was so, so much worse. The ragged hair, bristly like fox-tails, was the same shade even if it hung shaggily around his emaciated face. The bones were the same, even if his skin pulled taut and thin against them. His voice, tired and gravelly, still hit the same deep register Izuku had listened to for countless hours over the years. But five minutes ago he'd been tall and smiling, the reassuring pillar of hope Izuku had built half his childhood around. Now…

The hero lifted his shirt, exposing an angry spider-web scar over his deflated torso. "It's an injury I got from an enemy's attack five years ago," All Might said reluctantly, correctly interpreting Izuku's wordless flailing as a question. "Half of my respiratory organs were destroyed and I lost my whole stomach. I've become emaciated from repeated surgeries and the aftereffects. Right now, I can only work as a hero for about three hours a day."

For once, Izuku's voice stayed mostly steady while the rest of him flinched, trying to absorb that onslaught of information. Five years

ago? “Th-the fight with Toxic Chainsaw?” All Might had ‘taken a break’ after that one, it seemed, finally using his vacation days for something other than fundraisers for different charities. Izuku felt sick, imagining All Might alone on a hospital bed while everyone assumed he was relaxing on a beach somewhere. Five years had turned him into… this?

The man chuckled bitterly. “You're well-informed. But a punk like that? Couldn’t put a scratch on me. No, this fight was not made public. I asked that it not be made public.” All Might coughed slightly, wiping away blood from his chin. Izuku held back the urge to offer the man his handkerchief-- like his backpack and his clothes, it was probably completely gross and slimy still.

“The Symbol of Peace cannot be daunted by evil. I smile to show the pressure of heroes... and to trick the fear inside of me. But, boy,” his voice, quiet, raspy, turned even more serious. “Pros are always risking their lives.”

Izuku could only shrink backwards under the weight of that burning blue stare. His backpack buzzed slightly against his back.

“I cannot simply say, ‘You can become a hero even without power.’ It may be blunt, but… a hero without the power to protect… is nothing more than a distraction to their allies. At worst, they would become another victim to save.” Izuku finally had to look down, to keep All Might from seeing his tears. The man’s voice gentled slightly.

“If you want to help, you could always become a police officer. They may get a bad rep, but their work is important.” Coughing again, he raised himself with the help of the banister, every movement ginger and aching. Just before he reached the stairwell, he paused. Izuku’s hand was clamped over his mouth, but he knew he wouldn’t be able to say anything anyway.

“It's not bad to dream,” said the number one hero. “But you also have to consider what's realistic, young man.”

His slow footsteps echoed down the stairwell.

Izuku pulled his arms around himself, fighting not to curl up and sob. He shouldn't be crying, just because-- because--What was he expecting? All Might to say he’d make a great hero? That he'd take one look at a scrawny, *quirkless* kid, and smile, and say he looked forward to working with him in the field someday? Why would anyone, especially All Might, ever seriously think he could make it as a hero?

No matter how much he might have *dreamed* about it. That just wasn’t. Realistic.

His backpack buzzed again, insistent. What was-- his phone? Was someone calling?

Rubbing at his cheeks fruitlessly, he pulled one strap off his shoulder, unzipped the top and groped around for the phone. It turned out to be hiding under one of his mostly-dry textbooks. He’d probably have to replace them, even though the thought made him want to cry even more. Hitoshi probably still had his ‘hero notes for the future,’ even if maybe he’d be better off letting Noburu use them for shredding practice.

Hitoshi was calling.

“H-hello?” he whispered into the receiver.

“IZU, THANK GOD!”

“Aizawa, he still isn’t picking up,” Hitoshi fretted, fidgeting with his seatbelt as he glared at his phone. He willed his friend to answer, but the screen stayed caught on the contact photo of Izuku giggling at him from within a pile of cats, the hoodie of the cat-eared blanket slipping into his eyes.

“Keep trying,” Aizawa instructed, hands clenched tight around the wheel. “Hizashi’s still pestering Nedzu, hopefully we’ll get something back from the facial recognition search soon.” Not that it was technically legal to start a search for a minor without a police report or parental consent, but they’d tried to call Mrs. Midoriya and gotten no answer, so it was likely that her phone had died again. Sometimes it really was better to ask forgiveness than permission.

Especially when you were trying to track fucking All Might, who'd managed to jet off with a fucking thirteen-year-old choking victim. If something happened to Izuku because he’d been taken away from medical attention…

“Da--Aizawa, you’re doing the murder face again,” Hitoshi muttered, probably intending that he wouldn’t hear. He raised his voice slightly. “Save it for the actual murder.”

Aizawa stomped the gas to clear the light before it turned red, scowling harder. This would be so much easier if they had a direction to go beyond “he jumped that way.”

“Wait wait wait I think he’s picking up!” Hitoshi bounced in his seat as the phone clicked.

“H-hello?” The Problem Child whispered. Aizawa absolutely did not mutter a relieved “thank fuck.”

“IZU, THANK GOD!” Hitoshi exploded. “Where are you, can you see any street signs? Are you okay? How’s your breathing? What the fuck, dude, why didn’t you pick up the first five times I called?”

Aizawa reached out to cover his kid’s mouth, they wouldn’t be able to get an answer out of Izuku if Hitoshi steam-rolled over him.

In the silence (as Hitoshi shoved his hand away with an irritated growl), the phone picked up a shaky breath, then another, faster one.

“Hi-hicchan,” Izuku whispered.

“Oh no, Izu, are you okay? Are you hurt?” Hitoshi shoved himself further against the car door, out of reach of Aizawa’s exasperated reach for the phone.

“He-- he said-- he s-said--” From the sounds of it, Izuku was walking slowly, but there wasn’t much background noise. Was he in a quiet part of the city, or had he been taken out of the city entirely? Aizawa held a hand palm-up until Hitoshi finally relented and handed it over.

“Izuku,” Aizawa said, when it was clear the kid was having trouble talking. “Can you take a couple deep breaths for me? Toshi and I are on our way” he fucking hoped, “but we need you to tell us where you are.” And then he could find out what the fuck All Might had said to have his kid crying quietly like that.

Izuku presumably nodded, and blew out a slow breath. “I-I-I’m

climbing down," he said. "I c-can't-- I'm s-s-s-orry."

Couldn't see a street sign, he interpreted. Aizawa sighed, sending Hitoshi a warning glance when the kid opened his mouth.

"That's fine, kid. Can you see anything that looks familiar? Hear anything?"

An audible gulp.

"I-it s-s-sounds…" Izuku gasped, then seemed to start moving faster, maybe running. "E-e-explosions! K-KACCHAN!"

"Wait, Izu, don't hang--" The call cut out. "--up. FUCK!" Hitoshi grabbed the phone, already re-dialing.

"No, Toshi, call Hizashi," Aizawa ordered. "Have him expand the search with Nedzu. See if they can catch footage of Katsuki Bakugou and explosions."

Hitoshi scowled but complied, drumming his fingers impatiently as he passed on the message. As soon as the call finished, he re-dialed Izuku's number, then paused. There was a villain alert nearby, a pop-up image of that same fucking slime villain All Might had apparently failed to contain. Looking closer, he swore viciously.

"DAD! By Musutafu station, the big intersection, HURRY!"

In the freeze-frame from some newsperson's camera, he could see the

ugly pus-pile of a villain in the middle of a wall of flames, a writhing blond teenager in his grip.

‘Explosions. Kacchan.’

What really made his heart stop was the sight, caught in the corner of the frame, of a small green blur running *towards* the villain.

Gods-FUCKING-dammit, Izu, wasn’t once in one day enough?

“Seriously, dad, as fast as you can, he’s running right at that villain that nearly killed him,” Hitoshi gritted out.

Aizawa spared him a glance, then faced forward. “We’re still two minutes out, Toshi. Call Hizashi, he might know the other heroes on the scene.”

Hitoshi got dialing, praying to everything good in the world Izuku could stay safe for just two more minutes.

Chapter End Notes

Y'all might hate me for ending there but, who am I kidding?

You're WAY more likely to hate All Might.

Weak Point

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Noburu and Kurokawa-- the cowardly bastards-- ran off the moment they heard the voice from the alleyway.

He'd stayed (stupid), turned to face the fucking villain (so fucking stupid), hands tensed to explode. (Why, why had he been such a fucking idiot?)

The fucking disgusting puke villain must not have any pain receptors in his shitty oozing body, since Katsuki knew he'd sent a good explosion his way before he got him.

"You've got an excellent quirk, invisibility cloak!" The FUCKING DISGUSTING CREEP chuckled, wrapping around his arms. He yanked away and ran for the street (too fucking slow, stupid, stupid, stupid!) but the villain sent a wave of slime under his feet, tripping him up a few feet from freedom. Voices around him started shouting and screaming as he set off explosion after explosion, but the villain just laughed and pulled him further and further in, pulling his arms around like a FUCKING puppet to set the street ablaze. (Why--)

People screamed and stared, raised their fucking phones to get it on film. Death Arms, who must have been on patrol nearby, ran forward to attack, but even his Strong in the Arms quirk had no impact on the slime villain. His fist sank into the sludge, but instead of pulling him in further, the villain extended a tendril and whipped him into a nearby wall. (Why--)

Heroes were everywhere around, grabbing people from the fires, trying to control the damage before it spread to other buildings. Not a

single one tried to attack. (Why won't anyone come help?)

Struggling as hard as he could, Katsuki freed his head. "I'm not gonna let a WEIRDO WEAKLING like you EAT ME!" he screamed. The villain only laughed and grabbed him firmer. He set off his biggest explosion yet, not that it had any effect other than to make the villain *delighted* . (Get off, get off, get your *slimy creepy fucking sludge off of me!)*

Cameras flashed as news reporters arrived on the scene. Were they just going to stand around and film while he died?

No one would help him?

And the last thing he'd said to his mom was--

It was all Izuku's fault! The reason the villain escaped despite being defeated, the reason All Might couldn't capture him again-- it was all, all his fault!

He'd followed the sound of explosions (familiar from years ago, although it was weird that they were sounding *here* of all places) unconsciously pushing forward through the crowd, looking for a hero to appear. Well, they were *there*, actually-- he could see Backdraft using his hydrokinesis to put out the fires, while Kamui Wood pulled people up to safety from a nearby roof. Mt. Lady had run to join them but was too big to approach, since the buildings nearby were placed too closely and there were people running on the street-- was she only able to grow between two specific sizes? That would make it inconvenient to use her Quirk in, well, any densely populated area, actually--

But. There was no one approaching the villain, or his blonde victim. It had to be so painful, caught in that disgusting villain's grip, slowly suffocating while he laughed-- at least Izuku had had Hicchan to help him. This kid, thrashing desperately, eyes closed, he was alone in the middle of it all.

Desperate, familiar blood-red eyes opened to meet his.

Kacchan was--?

His legs moved.

Death Arms shouted something from behind him, he couldn't hear through the explosions and the pounding of his heart.

What am I doing what am I doing what am I doing HOW CAN I HELP HIM?

"When you don't know what to do, start with the basics. What do you have, what can you do with it, how can you get away," Kawai-sensei had told them. "And when in doubt--"

Izuku shrugged off his backpack and whipped it around, slinging it as hard as he could.

"*Go for the eyes!"*

The villain yelped, flinching back. The ooze fell away from Kacchan's mouth, and he coughed as he started to breathe again. Izuku was coughing, too, the smoke especially thick here in the center of the blaze.

"What the fuck are you doing, Deku?!"

"I-- B-Because you looked like you needed help!" His hands were completely ineffective, pawing away at the sludge as he tried to dig Kacchan loose. Were the eyes the only weak point? They were out of reach now, and he'd tossed away his backpack, although if he had to maybe there would be something sharp on the ground nearby--

Kacchan tried to say something else but the villain was recovering, starting to laugh again as he cut off Kacchan's air, teeth bared in a sickly grin.

Teeth that obviously weren't made of the same ooze as the rest.

It was stupid. It was really, really stupid. But, well, so was everything else he'd just done.

Izuku screamed and clawed frantically at the villain's pink, exposed gums. That got an actual scream as the sludge temporarily fell back in a defensive puddle.

"RUN!" he shrieked, grabbing Kacchan's arm as it emerged. They had to go quickly, get back to the line of heroes even if none of them had been able to deal with the villain very effectively so far--

All Might was there.

Not laughing, not smiling. But something new was in his eyes as he pushed Izuku and Kacchan behind him.

“I have to thank you, my boy! You reminded me to follow my own words. After all,” he coiled his arm back, punching forward with a thunderous force, “pros are always putting their lives on the line!”

Izuku slumped on the ground, his hand still caught on Kacchan’s wrist, as he struggled to control his coughing. Around them, people calmed, relieved at the sight of the Symbol of Peace. The remaining fires sputtered and died in the gentle rain.

Izuku shook, deep trembles from the crown of his head to his rubbery legs. Kacchan was uncharacteristically silent as the heroes came forward to praise him and his quirk, and to scold Izuku for running forward so recklessly.

Even so, he didn’t shove Izuku’s hand aside until the film crew approached.

By the time they arrived, the fight was over. Police were clearing the street while paramedics gathered on one side of the intersection, setting up a station to evaluate injuries. Hitoshi scanned the area for his friend, finally finding him slumped on the ground surrounded by heroes.

“IZU!” He didn’t have Yamada’s range, but the shout still rang through the square.

Aizawa gave him a glance. “I’ll get a paramedic to come, go ahead.”

Hitoshi ran.

“-- so reckless, you could have died!” Some hero with huge gloves was saying. Hitoshi ignored him.

“Izu, fuck, are you okay? What happened? Hey.” He crouched, reaching for his friend’s shoulder. Izuku was shaking, glassy-eyed. He really, really wanted to give him a hug, but that might not be the best idea when he was nearly hyperventilating like that. “Hey, just breathe, you’re okay. You *are* okay, right?”

“H-H-Hicchan,” Izuku whispered. “I-- I--!” He broke off, coughing. Fuck. Hitoshi rubbed his back, settling next to him. He glared at the gloved hero.

“So, what the fuck happened?”

The man frowned, but answered him. “Your *friend* jumped in the middle of a villain attack and nearly got himself killed. He’s just lucky All Might was there, or he might have--”

It looked like he was gearing up for another rant. Hitoshi dismissed him. “Cool. Please go away now.” Not worth the hassle of using his quirk on a hero even if he really wanted to tell him to fuck off. His meaning must have come through, because the man huffed but turned away grudgingly. “So, All Might was here, huh Izu? Dad’s gonna blow a gasket, you know? He’s getting a paramedic now to check your breathing.”

His friend shrunk, shoulders tense. “S-s-sorry.”

“Hey,” Hitoshi pulled him closer. “None of that. He won’t be angry at *you*.” Talking wasn’t much help when Izuku got like this, but it was better than nothing. “He’s pissed you were taken away from the paramedics.”

“M-m-my fault,” Izu argued. “I w-was the one who--” He stopped, coughing again.

“Slow breaths, Izu, just for now. And, uh, I might have told him All Might stole you?” Hitoshi winced at the *look* Izu gave him. “It kinda… looked like it. But anyway! Even if you were the one who left, he won’t be angry. He saves that for after he stops worrying, you know?” Izuku slouched further against his shoulder. “Like, a week after I broke my arm, he gave me the ‘don’t climb a tree to try and get a cat, leave that to people with gloves and ladders and training’ talk, you know? But for now he’s just gonna glare at everyone until he’s sure you’re okay, okay?”

“OI!” For the first time, Hitoshi realized that the other kid standing near the clump of heroes was Katsuki fucking Bakugou. “Deku!” He glared at the angry blond as he approached them.

“Can’t you just leave him alone, you--” Izuku put a hand on his arm, cutting him off.

“K-Kacchan,” Izu greeted, sounding exhausted. Maybe Baka-gou heard it too, because he clenched his jaw and looked away.

“Don’t think you saved me, all right? I coulda gotten free without

you," he growled.

Hitoshi narrowed his eyes.

"I-I-I know," Izuku said.

"Well… good!" He didn't really seem to know what to say after that, so he just glared at them both (trying to scorch Hitoshi in particular with his eyes) and stomped off.

"*So* mature," Hitoshi muttered, making a face at the other boy's back. Izuku let out a watery giggle.

"Here we are," Aizawa said, ushering over a young woman in an EMT uniform. "He was the victim that was called in half an hour ago, resuscitation after drowning." Izuku's eyes widened as Aizawa took a moment to crouch in front of him, look him over and rest a hand in his grime-and-smoke-stained hair. "Answer all of her questions, okay, kid? I'm gonna debrief with some of the heroes on-scene and be right back. Hitoshi," he turned, reaching out to pat his kid's shoulder, "check in with Hizashi and Nemuri, okay? Last I heard she was headed to the Midoriyas' apartment to clue in Inko."

Hitoshi snapped off a salute just to make Izuku smile. The paramedic took Aizawa's place to assess his friend and get him hooked up to an oxygen machine. He'd probably have to stay the night in the hospital, unless they had some sort of quirk for dealing with 'inhaled part of a really gross liquid quirk' injuries. For now, Hitoshi backed up enough to give the woman room, but grabbed Izuku's hand to squeeze comfortingly.

"Any chance we could get him a blanket? You know, for the shock?" he asked, only half-joking. The paramedic looked at him and back at

his friend, smiling gently.

“You know what? I have just the thing.”

‘Able to create quilts from thin air’ was not a quirk Hitoshi had expected from a first aid responder, but it took the last of that overwhelmed, blank look from Izu’s eyes and replaced it with a familiar burning curiosity, so he’d count it as a win.

Izu’s hand squeezed in his, drawing his eyes back from the policemen depositing garbage bags of slime into a villain transport vehicle.

I’m fine, he signed with his right.

Hitoshi squeezed back and settled in to wait. Izu was still pale, clothes tacky and grimy, a plastic mask fixed on his face to help his breathing. Still shaking slightly, visibly biting back tears every few minutes. He wasn’t fine.

But he would be.

Chapter End Notes

My computer's about to die, so I'm posting now!

Notes: Yes, Death Arm's quirk name is a Terry Pratchett reference (I couldn't resist when I saw that Horikoshi didn't name it).

I re-watched the first two eps to figure out who was there and what happened, so all the heroes except for like, two randos should be correct.

Izuku not knowing Katsuki was the victim-- he was as far away from the fight as All Might when he heard the explosions. He went to investigate the sounds because it sounded like Kacchan,

but he couldn't tell he was the victim until he saw the thing. Anyway.

Izuku @ Sludge Villain: this is happening because you didn’t floss. *sound of dentists losing their damn minds in the background*

I very nearly ended the chapter on "Kacchan didn't push his arm away until the film crew arrived" but then I took pity on Hitoshi.

Really, really couldn't resist giving Izuku a blanket. But also, "ability to summon blankets" would be a really good power for a first responder, so I'm not even a little sorry.

Hope you like it!!!! Next chapter, The Parents.

Just Desserts

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Most people who met Shouta and Hizashi after UA thought they'd always been together, opposites who counterbalanced each other's personality perfectly. That might be true, for a given value of 'perfectly,' but it didn't mean they'd never argued. One of their first serious fights had been, fittingly, about the way they fought. Or more specifically, the way they talked to each other when they were fighting.

Shouta wasn't a fan of shouting, even though Hizashi kept his quirk strictly controlled outside of villain fights. Raised voices made him tense and defensive, always had.

Hizashi, though, he hated *tone*. "You get snarky when you're angry," he'd confided when they finally cooled down. "And that's fine, but you--" he narrowed his eyes and cocked his head to the side slightly, mimicking Shouta's mannerisms-- "and you slow down. It's like 'Will you understand if I speak very… slowly… and use small words… you utter nincompoop.'" He slouched backward, folding his arms. "I don't care if you don't agree, you still have to treat me with respect. Having a different opinion than you doesn't make me *stupid.* "

So Hizashi learned to take a breath when his partner's shoulders started growing tight and check his volume. And Shouta learned to ask Hizashi to explain why he disagreed instead of trying to argue him into agreement.

He kept the tone in reserve, though. Sometimes you really, really needed to be able to look someone in the eyes and speak clearly and logically and be sure they understood *exactly* how wrong they were about everything. Hizashi, loving husband of nearly six years, had no problem with Shouta using what he called the "Too Stupid To Live"

voice on people who *really* deserved it.

Death Arms, Kamui Woods and Backdraft may not have committed the cardinal idiocy of moving a teenage drowning victim kilometers away from aid and into the path of another villain fight, but they weren't immune to the apparently contagious idiocy infecting pro heroes this afternoon. (Mount Lady had left too soon to be debriefed. He'd let Hizashi have a *word* with her agency in the morning.)

"You're saying…" He said, slowly. Carefully. Not at all calmly. "That after one of you attempted to attack the villain and was rebuffed, *all* of you focused on evacuation instead of capture and containment? And when a thirteen-year-old ran into the area of attack-- which, by the way, would not have happened if you had worked together to set up the perimeter instead of retreating to high ground and waiting for back-up…" he glared between them, "when a thirteen-year-old ran into a fight with a villain, accurately identified and attacked his weak points to give the captive a chance to breathe, and very nearly got the other kid entirely free, when a Good Samaritan *rescued a civilian without the use of a quirk and then suffered respiratory problems* , your response was…" The pause fell with almost audible weight as the heroes winced. "*Shouting at him.* "

His voice could have stripped paint. Death Arms opened his mouth. Shouta's eyes narrowed further.

His mouth shut.

"Now, it's only been two years since I renewed my Pediatric First Aid and Rescue license, but remind me of the part where you turn to a kid who's just been through a life-threatening experience in order to help someone else, and *actively try to make them feel worse*." Kamui Woods shuffled his feet.

Death Arms spoke up. “The kid was reckless! He nearly became another victim!”

“I didn’t ask if what he did was *smart.* I asked *how you reacted to it.* When a kid breaks his arm climbing a tree, do you yell at him for taking risks or do you *treat the injury?* ” Shouta turned back to check-- Hitoshi was still next to Izuku, holding his hand while the paramedic listened to his lungs. He had no idea where they had gotten the green blanket wrapped over Izuku’s shoulders, but he approved. Kamui Woods shuffled his feet again. “What.”

“We can’t reward a kid for charging into a villain fight,” the hero mumbled. “If more kids got that idea into their heads--”

Shouta stared at him.

“Where did you get the idea that reassuring a civilian… is a reward?”

“I--”

“When it is, in fact, an integral part of your *basic duty as a hero*.” He lowered his voice, intent. “If you had *done your job* and calmed the kid down enough to answer basic questions, you would have found out that he was just attacked by that same villain half an hour and had to be *resuscitated*. That he only ran in to help because, *as you could have found out,* the other victim was his *classmate,* and he didn’t want to watch him *die.* ” He pinched his brow to stave off a headache. “Did you. At any point. Have the paramedics look at the boys. Before you yelled at them?”

Backdraft dropped his head and shook it slowly. He’d expected better of the support hero. Out of all of them, Backdraft came from an agency that stressed disaster response and emergency first aid. He

should have known better.

"You treated a thirteen-year-old like a thrill-seeker. You berated him for his recklessness as if he confronted a villain in order to get attention, rather than to save a life. You failed to assess his need for first aid and completely ignored the possibility of trauma." He didn't bother to moderate the anger in his voice. "Give me *one reason* why I shouldn't report you all for negligence and insensitivity in the field."

To his satisfaction, the heroes glanced at each other briefly but didn't say a word. Not that he would have changed his mind, anyway. Reports of negligence required heroes to re-take any area of training they were marked as 'insufficient' for, unless they wanted their agencies to put a black mark in their record and decrease their patrols. Shouta had helped teach several of Musutafu's remedial Emergency Response training seminars for pro heroes before he started at UA. Any agency in the prefect that got a report of negligence from Eraserhead knew to treat the allegation *very* seriously.

A tall, blond man, thin to the point of emaciation, was making his way to where Hitoshi and Izuku sat. Shouta waved a hand at Backdraft, Death Arms and Kamui Woods as he moved to intercept. "We're done here."

He didn't stick around long enough to hear the sigh of relief.

The blond man had nearly reached the boys when he caught up. Near enough that Izuku had looked up to see who it was. Near enough he could see that the kid flinched and looked down again.

He stepped between them and stared the man down.

"Era--"

He *glared.*

“Aizawa.” From the tone, the other man was confused to see him here. Too damn bad.

“You and I should have a *talk*,” Shouta murmured. The man flinched.

“Ahaha, I’m always happy to talk, E-- Aizawa! But right now I need to--” he moved to the side, eyes fixed on *Shouta’s boys.*

“ *Yagi.* ” The name fell like an axe in the silence.

Yagi sighed and nodded. Shouta led the way to a side alley, out of sight of the film crew still casing the scene. He stayed near the entrance, half an eye on Hitoshi and Izuku. Yagi sagged slightly, curling a hand over his abdomen. The idiot had probably exceeded his time for today. Recovery Girl would have a coronary.

“Aizawa, what is this about?” Yagi didn’t bother putting on the cheerful bluster when it was just the two of them. Voice low and gravelly, he sounded his age. Whatever age that was.

“That kid.” Shouta said. “You took him away from paramedics, *flew* him to a different part of the city, and the next we heard from him, he was crying and running into a villain attack. And *now--”* he darted a look at the boys and turned back to glare at Yagi, “ *now* I find that he *knows what you look like in this form*.”

Yagi looked away.

“What. The FUCK. Did you say to *my kid?* ” Shouta demanded.

Yagi inhaled wrong and coughed a spurt of blood.

“Okay, Hitoshi, I’ll let her know. You just stay with the bean sprout, okay? We’ll meet you at the hospital.” Nemuri hung up one-handed as she took the last turn toward the Midoriyas’ apartment. Principal Nedzu, who had too many fingers in way too many pies, had assured them all that Inko Midoriya had clocked out of work and left for home before her cell phone died. If Nemuri was very, very lucky, she’d be able to meet the woman *before* she saw her son nearly die on the evening news.

When Mrs. Midoriya answered the door, face ghost-pale under her tears, Nemuri knew she hadn’t been lucky enough.

“Midoriya-san. Hitoshi and Shouta sent me. Izuku is *okay*.” She reached for the other woman’s trembling hand. “He’s going to be fine. Paramedics are looking after him now.” Those wide green eyes full of tears were exactly like the little bean sprout’s. “I have a car, do you want me to take you to the hospital to meet him?”

Mrs. Midoriya raised one hand to her mouth and *sobbed.*

Shit.

Nemuri gripped her other hand tight, trying to ground her. “They just

want him to spend the night in observation, okay? I can take you to him." Hizashi had taught her most of what she knew about reassuring civilians. Voice even and level. Eye contact. Offering physical contact if they wanted it. And when all else fails…

"It's gonna be okay, shhhh." As Mrs. Midoriya wavered on her feet, Nemuri steadied her shoulder and guided her to sit down in the entrance and put her head between her knees. "I know it's a shock, but Izuku's going to be *fine.* From what Hitoshi told me, he saved two lives today."

Mrs. Midoriya mumbled something into her knees.

"Yes?"

The woman raised her head, wiping away tears with her sleeve. "I-I'm gonna ground him until he-- until he's *thirty,* " she whispered.

Nemuri had to laugh. "Hitoshi will help you," she promised gently.

Leaning back slightly, she shuffled until she could sit comfortably against the shoe rack behind her, Mrs. Midoriya's left hand held securely in her right. "It's all going to be okay, Midoriya-san. Take a couple deep breaths for me, okay?" She was rewarded with a trembling smile before Mrs. Midoriya rested her head against her knees and took deep, shuddering breaths.

Nemuri squeezed her hand and sat silent, letting the woman unravel and pull herself back together. Hitoshi had said the ambulance hadn't even left yet, so they had time to sit and breathe. She'd bring Mrs. Midoriya to the hospital when she was good and ready.

The bean sprout might be grounded until he was thirty, but she was willing to bet Mrs. Midoriya would want to hug the stuffing out of him first.

Toshinori may not have known much about underground heroes, but he was *very* sure that Eraserhead had never told him anything about a kid. He'd adopted that little green-haired kid? They didn't look that alike, although he supposed Eraserhead and Present Mic could have contracted a surrogate, but. Well. Either way.

He was FUCKED.

"Ah… I." He swallowed back bitter copper. "He… asked me if he could be a hero. Without a quirk."

Eraserhead's eyes *burned*.

He straightened. "I ran out of time, when he asked. I had to explain what happened-- my time limit. I asked him not to make it public." At least if he was Eraserhead's, he'd know the value of secrecy. That was one weight off of his mind.

"Stop beating around the bush. What. Did. You. Tell. Him?" Eraserhead demanded.

Toshinori grinned reflexively, the smile he knew made him look like a skeleton. "I told him he couldn't be a hero."

Eraserhead's jaw clenched. He seemed to be waiting.

"And I… might have said he'd be a liability. In the field."

Eraserhead's eyes narrowed.

"A hero needs the power to protect others." He sighed. "I couldn't simply encourage him to follow an impossible dream! But I… need to apologize. For the way I spoke. And offer him… something."

"Offer... what?" Eraserhead asked, dagger-sharp.

"Ah. That is..." he waved his hands fruitlessly. Even to Eraserhead, he couldn't expose his secret. "Something I should discuss with the boy alone... Just. Something to... help him?" He winced.

For a second, Eraserhead's hand twitched to his scarf. Toshinori eyed him cautiously.

"Is that all?" the underground hero asked, dangerously quiet. Toshinori nodded.

" *You.*" He lingered over the word, contemptuous. "You are *extremely lucky*." It wasn't a compliment. Toshinori curled a hand over his abdomen. He certainly didn't feel lucky.

"You are *lucky* I know you well enough that I know you didn't mean that 'offer' to sound like it did. You are *lucky* that I will allow Izuku's mother to decide when and where you can meet him to give that

apology. And you are *very lucky* that Izuku is the person he is." Eraserhead stepped forward to jab a finger at Toshinori's sternum. "*Do you know. What happens. When you tell someone they can't do good? "* he hissed.

Toshinori blinked, stepping backwards. Eraserhead glared at him.

"You *should.* After all, you fight it *every day*," the underground hero ground out. "Tell a kid often enough that they're worthless, that they should *give up*, that they can't achieve their dreams… most of the time, they try to prove you *right. "* The finger jabbed at Toshinori's sternum again. "Sometimes, if you're *very lucky,* you find someone who doesn't give up. Someone who would do anything to prove you *wrong. "* He glanced, again, back to the boys. "Izuku nearly died doing that today."

Toshinori followed his gaze. From this distance, he could only distinguish the kids by the color of their hair, bright purple and deep green huddled together under a blanket. The green kid, Izuku, looked like he was crying.

Toshinori gently brushed Eraserhead's hand aside. "…I know. That's why I need to apologize."

Eraserhead looked coolly back. "You do. That's what *you* need." Then he smiled slowly.

It wasn't a nice smile.

"And you will. When his mother allows it."

“But--” He had to take it back, now that he’d seen the kid, the selfless way he ran forward to save a life, the way he'd broken through Toshinori's helpless fog and inspired him to *move*. He had to let the kid know he had what it took, to become a hero. To become his successor.

“What *my kid* needs, is to have a good cry, go to the hospital, see his mom, have a round of antibiotics and *start to feel safe again*.” He let the words sink in. The implication, that Izuku wouldn’t feel safe around the man who tried to crush his dream. “His mother will decide whether you apologize in person or by letter. She or another *trusted adult* will be present when and *if* you are allowed to see him.” He leaned slightly closer. “And the next time you get the bright idea to tear a kid down, tell him a *highly confidential* secret, and give him some kind of ‘secret offer’ without consulting his parents or guardians… *Think. Again.* ”

Toshinori nodded, sagged against the alley wall. There wasn’t much more he could do.

Eraserhead glanced at him and nodded. Conversation over. Without a second look, he exited the alleyway and walked towards the kids. His kids? Izuku and the purple one.

He crouched on Izuku’s other side and set a hand on those springy green curls, speaking softly. Toshinori saw the kid lean into the touch, saw the small smile grow under the kid’s oxygen mask as Eraserhead wrapped an arm around his shoulders and let him curl into his side.

He swallowed salt and copper and squared his shoulders. Eraserhead knew his contact information. He or the kid’s mother (surrogate?) would reach out, when the kid was ready. Toshinori would be ready, too.

For the best damn apology of his life, he’d *better* be ready.

Chapter End Notes

"Aizawa Goes Off: The Chapter," basically. Plus some Mamadoriya and Midnight. I hope y'all like it!

Meanwhile Kouji

Chapter Notes

> WARNING: VERY SHORT CHAPTER! this just didn't quite fit tonally w what I have planned next but it's Kouji & the boys while they're at the hospital waiting for Mamadoriya

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Catwhisperer:

So the shiba inu pups are finally de-wormed, I think they’re going to get adopted like, next week maybe? Dad says you can come visit the shelter to help socialize them this weekend if you’re free.

Catwhisperer:

Guys?

Catwhisperer:

Weren’t we gonna facetime tonight? or did I get the time wrong or something?

Catwhisperer:

I can reschedule, I just wanna know.

Catwhisperer:

Did both of you lose your phones or?

Catwhisperer:

HOLY SHIT I JUST SAW THE NEWS IZUKU HITOSHI PLESE RESPOND

*PLEASE

HELLO

ARE YOU OKAY

WHAT IS GOING ON?

Catwhisperer:

DO I NEED TO TRACK YOU DOWN BECAUSE MY CROWS KNOW WHAT YOU LOOK LIKE NOW

<3puns:

Kouji, sorry, we're okay. Izu's in the hospital for the night because he's an IDIOT AND A EHRO but we're fine

<3puns:

*hero

Catwhisperer:

Hospital????

Details??? Now??

<3puns:

This is gonna take a while

Okay

So

Izu and I were walking home and a villain came out of nowhere so Izu pushed me out of the way except it was a fucking ball of sewer sludge so it tried to drown him before I managed to get him loose and then All Might showed up outta nowhere while I was doing CPR cuz Izu

STOPPED BREATHING and then he woke up and All Might was like ‘sup good work’ and signed his notebook but then he yeeted into the sun with the villain except Izu was holding onto his leg so he yeeted them BOTH into the sun

Catwhisperer:

Okay what the fuck?

<3puns:

So then Aizawa showed up and he was like ‘Fucking All Might what the fuck’ right, exactly, so he had me and Yamada trying to find out where the fcuk they went while we tried to follow in his car and then Izu called us but he was crying and he didn’t know where he was, and then I guess he heard a villain attack so he hung up but then I saw the villain area alert and he was IN THE PICUTRE WITH THE SAME FUCKING PIECE OF SHIT SLIME

Catwhisperer:

Wait, the same villain? I thought All Might took care of it

<3puns:

SO DID WE, MY DUDE, SO THE FUCK DID WE!!!

Catwhisperer:

Well, shit, what happened next?

<3puns:

Well by the time we got there it was all over but Izu apparently ran at the villain to let his victim (bastard Katsuki by the way) not die from suffocation while all the heroes at the scene were extremely busy not rescuing him, and then All Might came out of nowhere AGAIN to blast

the fucker to smithereens and vanish WIHTOUT Izu this time thank fuck. So I got to Izu while Aizawa got a paramedic bc you know, CPR happened, and also that Literal Shit Emoji was gross as fuck, and the heroes were just YELLING AT IZU, like what the FUCK

<3puns:

ANd now that I think about it I shoulda gotten their pictures but izu probably knows who they were if you wanna print out pics for your literal murder squad

Catwhisperer:

Please stop calling them that anyone reading the messages will get the wrong idea

<3puns:

Still telling the story here so ANYWAY I got the dude to tell me what happened becasue Izu was, well, yeah, and apparently he attacked The Shit to get Bastard Kid free and that's why they were pissed at him? But Dad got the paramedic to come and breathalyze him

*breathalyze

*BREATHING MASK

And we got a blanket

And now we're in the hospital cuz he needs to be Observed and we're waiting on his mom. And Yamada and Aunt Nemu, but mainly his mom.

Catwhisperer:

Okay. Is he there?

<3puns:

Hi Kouda!

I mean Kouji, sorry

Hicchan let me use his phone

Sorry for making you worry!!!!

Catwhisperer:

I'm just glad you're okay. You'll be out of the hospital tomorrow, right?

<3puns:

I hope so??

I'm not sick, but they're worried about contamination from, well, the villain. Actually I think they really should have had Kacchan here too because he's at risk for catching anything as well but I think he went home already and my phone's kind of. Dead. So I can't call his house to find out.

Catwhisperer:

That's

Very you of you.

Your phone's dead?

<3puns:

It was in my pocket, so. I think it fell out during All Might's Texas Smash. I think it's under warranty for villain attacks tho, I'll ask Mom when she gets here WAIT OH MY GOD IM GONNA DIE

Catwhisperer:

What???? Did a test come back? WHAT IS GOING ON HELLO

<3puns:

It's me again. Izu's a little busy trying to start hypervetnilating again DUDE CALM DOWN.

<3puns:

He just keeps saying, 'No you don't understand MOM REALLY HATES HOSPITALS.'

<3puns:

I'm on like 15% battery so I'm gonna sign off for now, but I'll let you know when I get pics for your Friends In High Places

Catwhisperer:

You make them sound like politicians but at least it's not 'literal murder squad'

Lmk more details when you get 'em

<3puns:

Cross my <3

Lol

Night

Catwhisperer:

Good night!

<3puns:

A FLOCK OF RAVENS IS CALLED A CONGRESS. THEY'RE LITERALLY YOUR POLITICIAN FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES I AM A GENIUS

oh whoops it's 3 am

night

Chapter End Notes

The puns:
Hitoshi's last name 'Shinsou' is a homonym for the japanese word for 'heart.' So his username is pretty much "Shinsoupuns" as WELL as "heartpuns" like 'i heart puns'

the author also hearts puns if you couldn't tell

a group of crows is called a murder so Kouji does, in fact, have a literal murder squad.

Yes, Hitoshi did take a video of The Crows v Bakugou and send it to Kouji at some point with the title "I've just seen a murder!"

Feel free to comment with suggestions for Izuku's screen name because I'm currently drawing a blank.

Mothers

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

By the time she reached fourth grade, Inko was used to returning home after school and feeling the phantom prickle of her mother's tears against her cheeks. Aoi Yamagawa would set down her photo album and wipe at her face, smiling at her daughter with watery eyes.

"Sorry, baby, I'm just feeling a little blue today," she'd say, opening her arms for a hug. Inko would smile through her tears and walk into her mom's blue, blue arms.

"Can we try and feel yellow now?" she'd ask. Her mom would squeeze her closer, and the feeling of *~eyes too hot throat too hot chest too tight~* would finally start to fade.

"Sure, baby, let's try for yellow," she'd say, and they'd bake cookies to smear them with frosting or play the radio loud and dance as crazily as they could or make hot cocoa and watch cartoons. By the time her dad came home from work, he'd walk into a cocoon of *~warm blanket warm hands warm smile~* and they'd shout, "Welcome home!" as yellow as yellow could be.

In sixth grade, her mom began fading, deep sea blue to sky to eggshell, as her hair thinned and her skin grew tight against her bones. By the time she went to the hospital to stay, the yellow was all gone from their home. Inko had nightmares that her mom would fade right through the bed, that the tubes leading into and out of her mom would leach all her colors out of her until she was just brittle glass against the white sheets.

Her dad would drive them to the hospital after school, park the car and unbuckle his seatbelt, reach across to tuck her into his side. “Cry it all out here, okay kiddo?” He’d murmur. “I know it’s hard and it’s scary, but Mom’s feeling blue without us. And we’re gonna try for yellow today.” And she’d rub her eyes dry as they left the parking lot, walk the long hallway to her mother’s isolated room, and walk smiling into roiling grey.

In the passenger seat of Kayama’s car, Inko sat rigid, hands clasped tight against themselves, eyes fixed on the road ahead. She couldn’t get the image out of her head-- Izuku, trapped in white sheets and thin plastic tubes, stealing the green from his eyes until they were dishwater grey, until they closed and didn’t open again. Kayama chanced a look her way and sighed.

“We’re nearly there.”

Inko didn’t trust her voice. “M-hmm.”

“He’s going to be okay,” Kayama assured her, smiling softly as she switched lanes. “Shouta said they’re waiting on some tests, but Izuku’s breathing is better and he’s responding well to treatment.”

Inko nodded, biting her lip hard. She didn’t say anything more as they entered the parking lot, but she had her seatbelt undone before they came to a stop. Kayama collected Inko’s forgotten purse from the back seat and locked the car, striding to catch up to the worried mother.

“This way, Midoriya-san,” she corrected, catching Inko’s elbow with a gentle hand to direct her towards the ICU. They walked hurriedly down a long hall, past rooms of gently beeping machines and quiet patients. Inko could almost feel it, the phantom prickle of her mother’s tears on her cheeks.

Her boy was curled up on the bed, half-leaning on his friend's shoulder as they watched a show. Inko took in the red rims of his eyes, the matted grime in his green hair, the plastic breathing mask strapped across his freckled cheeks. That tiny, trembling smile as he looked up to meet her eyes.

A deep groan rumbled from her chest as her knees suddenly went weak. "I-Izuku…" She stumbled forward, half-falling, half-crawling onto the bed as she gathered both boys in her arms. Relief set loose the sobs in her chest, until it felt like the whole bed was shuddering. "Izuku…" she pulled him closer, careful of the mask as she shifted to hug him more firmly, as Hitoshi, poor boy, squirmed free to leave them space on the bed. She kissed his filthy hair again and again. "I love you, Izu, I love you so much, never do that again, you hear me? Never scare me like that again," murmured deep and heartfelt as she held him in her arms, her bird-thin boy safe in her arms.

Her boy slumped forward then, tucked his face against her shoulder and *cried*, the way he used to when he fell at the playground, when he tried to rescue a cat and got scratched, when he heard he'd never have the quirk he so desperately wanted. Her brave, kind-hearted boy, whose smiles were sunshine yellow. Her boy who could have been lost today.

When he started to pull back, she let him, wiping tears from his cheeks and from her own.

"I-I'm sorry, Mom. I'm really, r-really sorry," he whispered.

"It's okay." She pulled back, sat down in the chair Kayama pulled out for her, dropped her hand to Izuku's to squeeze it tight. "It's okay now."

Aizawa stood up, setting his phone next to Hitoshi. He met her eyes with a slight grimace and nodded to the door, starting towards it once she nodded back. Hopefully he could explain exactly what happened to land her baby in the hospital.

She squeezed her boy's hand one more time and reluctantly let it go. Hitoshi leaned forward and said, "Don't worry, I'll keep an eye on him. Can never be too careful on Izu-watch."

She smiled at him, at Izuku and the way he leveled a glare at his friend, at Kayama settling down to sit next to her boys, and followed Aizawa out of the room.

Katsuki was nearly home when he remembered his phone had been in his pocket. Fucking sludge fuck had probably killed it dead, although maybe he could dry it out with rice when he got home. The bastard's stink was all over his clothes, his shoes, his bag, his fucking *hair*. Smelled like shit, worse than shit, sewer and vomit and rotten fruit and smoke, smelled like fucking death.

He'd thrown up, in one of the bushes past the park. Just the smell getting to him. He'd be fine once he had a shower and beat the shit out of something. Probably the training dummy in his room, although it was on its last legs already. Fuck.

The door banged open before he could even touch it, his mom yelling in his face about seeing the news and why didn't he answer his fucking phone, well OBVIOUSLY because it got fucking DROWNED, OLD HAG (not the only thing nearly drowned, nearly dead, he'd nearly--) and she yelled louder, grabbing at his shoulders to look him over, squeezing tight as she found no injuries, just the reek of death seeping into his skin. His dad pulled her back, set a hand on Katsuki's

shoulder as he asked if he was okay, obviously he was FUCKING FINE, geez, and he pulled away from their clingy shit and stomped into the bathroom.

He normally liked the water hot enough to sting, but the heat and that *smell*, rising in steam throughout the bathroom-- he swung the dial to cold and set to scrubbing, clenching his jaw as he obliterated every last trace of that fuck from his skin. He'd been. Fucking. Covered in that shit.

If he gagged reflexively, it was only from the smell.

He washed his hair once, then again, clenched his teeth against the cold, rinsed off again and finally turned the water off, wrapped himself in a towel and sat on the edge of the tub, shuddering. His old hag would bang on the door in a few minutes, would want him to get dressed and come out and *talk about it*. She'd want to talk about Deku, too, how he ran out of nowhere (fucking idiot) and tried to *save him* (arrogant bastard) and how he must still care about him ('he'll forgive you, if you show an ounce of regret, but I--') and other FUCKING BULLSHIT LIKE THAT.

He pulled the towel tighter around his shoulders, kicked at the pile of clothes he was going to bundle up and *burn*, scowled at the door. His old hag started knocking, "Katsuki! Come out when you're done, we need to have a talk!"

Fucking. Hell.

Shouta led Mrs. Midoriya to the coffee machine, partly to have something to do with his hands and partly because the woman looked

like she could use something warm to drink. She probably wouldn't sleep much tonight anyway, assuming she went to sleep at all.

"Aizawa-san." She accepted the steaming hot paper cup he handed to her. "What-- what happened? How did Izuku--?"

"From what Hitoshi told me," he began, "Izuku helped save two lives today."

One of her hands flew to her mouth.

He continued. "Izuku and Hitoshi were walking home when a villain with a liquid morphing quirk attacked them. Izuku pushed Hitoshi out of the way of the attack and was… drowned. Briefly. Hitoshi managed to subdue the villain and began CPR, when All Might appeared." He grimaced. "It's unclear exactly what happened-- Izuku maintains that he grabbed onto All Might as he began to leap into the air-- but the end result was, Izuku was removed from the scene just as an ambulance arrived to check him over. By the time we managed to get in contact with him, he was in close proximity to another attack by the same villain." He raised a hand to the bridge of his nose, trying to stave off the headache growing behind his eyes. "There were heroes on the scene, but they were focused entirely on containment of the fire the victim's quirk had started. Katsuki Bakugou."

Inko fumbled the cup but managed not to drop it. Shouta quirked a quick smile.

"Izuku was close enough to see that Bakugou was in trouble, and he acted. Targeted the villain's weak points rather well, and nearly got the kid free by himself, as far as I can tell. All Might turned up to contain the villain, and Hitoshi and I arrived to get the kid medical attention. According to the paramedic, there's a chance he might have inhaled some of the villain's liquid form. They're testing his blood and

the villain's quirk tonight just to make sure he won't… catch anything nasty." At this, Inko did drop her cup. Shouta grabbed some napkins to help her wipe up the spill.

"He-- He could-- what kind of illnesses are they worried about?" Inko asked, white-faced, dabbing at the floor half-heartedly.

"They're mainly worried about pneumonia, the flu," he answered. "One of the staff has a quirk that can target and kill bacteria if it becomes necessary, although they only use it with parental consent."

Inko nodded, and hoped it wouldn't come to that. "A-and his lungs are… okay? I thought, with the breathing mask, they might be worried about damage or--"

Shouta laid a hand on her shoulder, patted it once before he stood up. "His lungs are fine, and he's young and physically fit. They assured me there should be no permanent damage." *As long as the villain hadn't been carrying any dangerous diseases in that sludge.* "Kid mostly seems worried that Bakugou would be at risk as well, although that kid wasn't taken to the hospital."

"I-I should call Mitsuki," Inko said weakly. "I. Later. I'll call her later."

Shouta nodded. He didn't want to overwhelm the woman, who was clearly aching to go back to the room with her son. She was overwhelmed enough already, but… as a parent, he would want to know.

"There's one more thing." He grimaced at the look on her face. "When Izuku… *left* with All Might, they had a conversation. Izuku asked him if he could be a hero without a quirk."

Inko winced.

"All Might apparently told him that he'd be a *liability*. That he'd do better to give up his dream completely because it isn't *realistic*." Shouta reined in the impulse to let his eyes burn. "He saw Izuku rescue Bakugou, and would like to apologize for his words. If you allow him to."

Inko bit her lip, curled her arms around her torso, empty cup held loosely in her hand. "He… said that?"

Shouta nodded.

"I--" She couldn't deal with this right now. "He might be *right,* but--" *I'm sorry, Izuku, I'm so sorry*, watching her boy crumple into sobs before her eyes, "He has a point, I know. It's… true, but--" *Mom, can I still be a hero like All Might?*, those desperate green eyes looking through her, looking for something she could never give him.

Shouta's eyebrows drew together as she spoke. "I would suggest you don't say anything to Izuku about it for now. When you're ready, I can contact All Might to meet with you both." He'd probably try to make his *secret offer* then, too.

Inko looked up sharply. "You… have All Might's contact?"

He shrugged. "Hizashi's met him before."

"...Right." She obviously didn't entirely believe him, but she looked

past him and let it go. “If that’s all…”

“That’s all.” He watched as Izuku’s mother pulled her shoulders back, pulled herself together, and walked back towards her son’s room. He allowed himself to glower at the coffee machine as he made cups for Nemuri and Hitoshi-- no one would sleep well tonight, that was a given, might as well embrace it.

He might be right, he has a point -- He sucked in a controlled breath and let it out slowly. No use upsetting the kid even more by walking into his room angry. But still, if that was what Izuku heard from his hero, from his own mother, it was no wonder the kid was so timid with talking about his dream.

As if power was the only thing that made a hero.

Shouta gripped the cups carefully and ferried them to the hospital room, depositing one in Nemuri’s hands and one next to the bed for Hitoshi. He pulled the green quilt Izuku had been given by the paramedic from the foot of the bed and spread it more evenly across the kid’s legs, noting the way his eyelids were starting to droop. Maybe one of them would get some sleep tonight after all.

“Dad,” Hitoshi looked at him over the rim of his cup, already half empty. “Can you turn the channel back to that historical drama? Izu thinks he knows who framed the mistress for murder.”

He tousled his kid’s hair and grabbed the remote to do as asked. Nemuri was texting, probably letting Hizashi know the room number. Mrs. Midoriya settled next to her son to watch the show, setting a gentle hand over his with a small, watery smile.

Shouta settled back in his chair in the corner, waiting for his partner

and the results of Izuku's tests.

Chapter End Notes

OOF THIS WAS HARD TO WRITE

notes:

Inko's mother, Aoi Yamagawa. Has blue skin naturally, her quirk is a field of empathy projection she can't turn off. Anyone within a certain radius will get a sympathetic response of what she feels (start crying if she cries, feel like smiling if she smiles, feel nauseous if she's nauseous. Inko's father jokes that he lost weight whenever they went traveling because of Aoi's motion sickness.) Died when Inko was in sixth grade.

Aoi's favorite song was probably Eiffel 65's "Blue" (da ba dee da ba dai).

Trying to toe the line here between "Inko is a loving mother who wants her kid to be safe" and "unsupportive of Izuku due to fear." Really really not trying to bash her here, I just want to show what her behavior would probably look like from the outside (considering how she reacted when Izuku was diagnosed).

Fun fact for this chapter: the word for "fear of hospitals" is "nosocomephobia." You're welcome.

Katsuki's family situation is different. He gets a cameo because a) reaction to being attacked when his quirk couldn't save him and b) example of a kid without a solid support system. Or, possibly, any support system. Trauma has consequences, Izuku and Katsuki did not get out of this encounter unscathed.

Not gonna go into any spoilers, but the Apology and Izuku's choice are coming up. Gonna stick some fluff in before we get there, most likely.

And finally, thank you for reading!

P.P.S. Did anyone notice the clue about colors in this chapter cuz I'm proud of it.

Family

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Literature class was not Izuku's strong point, which is why he was lying awake at ungodly-o'clock pondering whether it counted as verbal or situational irony that doctors kept telling him to rest while they wandered into his room every hour to check his breathing. He'd fallen asleep a few times, but then he'd hear the murmur of voices down the hall or a change in the background noise of air conditioning and humming machinery and he'd be dragged back to awareness.

Mom had held his hand tight and stayed as late as visiting hours allowed, until Ms. Nemuri put a hand on her shoulder and offered to drive her home. Aizawa had offered to stay the night, although Izuku wasn't entirely sure how the man had planned to go against hospital policy. Hitoshi had actually tried to hide under his bed from the nurses, but the only thing that had accomplished was making Izuku laugh so hard he started coughing again. Still, they had all gone and he was alone.

Izuku burrowed deeper into his blanket and managed a smile, warm at the memory of how many people had come to see him so far. Even Yamada had come to visit before he had to leave for the radio station. The man had bustled in half an hour after his mom with a basket full of fruit, taken one look at Izuku lying on the bed and gone to the nurses to demand some warm wet towels to rub the last of the villain's gunk out of his hair. Izuku hadn't even realized how gross he was feeling until finally that horrible smell was entirely gone. Mom had lent him her comb, and Yamada had nearly laughed himself sick when the last of the tangles was gone and Izuku's hair had poofed to twice its normal volume. Hitoshi had taken a picture on Aizawa's phone to send to Kouji in the morning.

He couldn't help but compare it to the last time he'd been to the hospital, when it was just him and Mom waiting in the emergency

room for a doctor to set his broken arm. He'd been crying quietly in the taxi on the ride over, trying desperately to choke back his sobs since he was already ten and too old to be such a crybaby. Mom had pulled him to her side and petted his hair while they waited, breathing slow and deep to calm him down, and he'd wanted her to hum to him the way she did when he came down with a cold, but she'd looked around the waiting room and kept quiet, just rocking him gently until a nurse called their names.

And when they stood up to go see the doctor, all the pain had come crashing into him, making him dizzy and nearly nauseous, and he'd pressed his lips together as tight as he could as a man with icy cold hands touched his wrist and the swollen red area of the break, and told him he was a brave boy for bearing with it and not making a sound.

He'd wondered if that was what bravery was, to be quiet even when you were hurting so much you wanted to scream.

Yamada had told him he was brave, today, while Mom had scrubbed at his hair. Mom had given him a *look* but nodded to Izuku, smiled a small smile at him. So maybe bravery was also running screaming at the thing that nearly killed you, to keep it from killing someone else.

Izuku was pretty sure he knew which kind of brave Mom would rather he was.

Another nurse walked into the room, looked over the machines and Izuku's barely-cracked-open eyes, smiled at him and left. Izuku resisted the urge to pull the quilt up over his head.

He hadn't been thinking of being brave or being a hero when he ran to get Kacchan free, though. Or when he pushed Hitoshi back out of the way. If he'd been thinking anything, it was just ... *No.* Not even "No,

you can't take my friend," or "No, you can't suffocate my childhood playmate," or anything. Just, No. I won't let this happen if I can stop it.

Hitoshi had left him his notebook, next to the basket of oranges and bananas. Izuku didn't need to open it to see the quote he'd written on the inside cover. All Might's signature was in there now, just a few pages from the end. The mark of his favorite superhero, who thought he was useless, that he'd be a burden, even if he hadn't outright said it like that… and the words of his favorite hero from before anyone had any powers that put them above the rest. In a way, he'd held her words closer than anyone else's, closer even than All Might's beaming smile. He'd put her picture up with his posters of other heroes because she'd taken the time to say, 'People should never think that you have to be a very special person in order to help those who need you.'

He didn't think he was brave. And he *knew* he wasn't special. So maybe All Might had been right that he'd never be a hero like him. But... he had done *something* , even if it hadn't completely worked. And he knew if another situation like it ever came up, he'd try to do *something* again.

He only wished he could be sure that it would be enough, that *he'd* be enough. To help anyone who might need him.

A nurse passing by dropped something with a sharp clatter and Izuku sighed. On the upside, if he never managed to fall asleep, he probably wouldn't have any nightmares.

Shouta wasn't surprised when Support came walking on his face at three in the morning and led him into the kitchen. The lights were on, the electric kettle was bubbling, and his kid was in a huddle of

blankets and cats on the tile floor. He pulled another mug from the cabinet and rummaged in a drawer for Hizashi's Sleepytime tea.

Hitoshi wasn't crying, but his eyes were red. He was petting Stella with shaking hands.

The kettle finished boiling, a tiny click as the power button switched off and its blue light winked out. Shouta filled the mugs and settled on the tile next to his kid. The pillows they'd attached to the counter to avert cat collisions were surprisingly comfortable as back-rests.

Hitoshi didn't look up until Shouta handed him his mug. Support took the time to rub her head against Hitoshi's knee before she demanded access to Shouta's lap.

Hitoshi took a sip of his tea, eyes squinting slightly the way they did when he was about to cry but didn't want to show it. Shouta reached out, slow and visible, to lay a hand on his shoulder.

"Was it the same dream?" he asked.

Hitoshi shook his head and slumped back against the counter. Stella voiced a small protest at the change of position.

"Was it about what happened today?"

Hitoshi's shoulders tensed. Shouta sighed.

"Do you want to talk about it, or do you want a distraction?"

Hitoshi shifted slightly, ignoring Stella's grumbling as he leaned into Shouta's side. Shouta lifted his arm to let his kid settle under it.

"...he wasn't breathing." Hitoshi's voice was rough with sleep and fear. "I couldn't save him, and he was just *lying there* , and then his-- his *body* just started sinking and I couldn't--" He took a quick breath, held it to keep from shaking. "When I woke up, I was-- I wanted to call him, but his phone's broken, and he's in the *hospital* , and I was looking up drowning and you can drown the day after you're saved if there's something in your lungs, and if you're without oxygen for long enough different parts of your brain die, and he just… got back up and ran right into fire for Katsuki fucking Bakugou and I *know* he'd do it again. Cuz he's gonna be a hero. But he saved me and if that villain hadn't-- I couldn't do *anything* , Dad!"

Shouta pulled him closer and rescued the mug from his hand when it threatened to spill. Hitoshi pressed his forehead into his dad's shoulder and tried to just breathe.

"You were both in danger today, and I'm sorry I wasn't there to help," he murmured. "It's scary when someone you care about is in danger. It makes you feel helpless. But you did the right thing, kiddo. You got him out and you got him breathing again." Hitoshi shuddered. "You saved him, and I'm *so proud of you.* "

The collar of Shouta's shirt was getting damp. He paid it no mind.

"Izuku's going to be fine. He's just in the hospital until the doctors are sure he didn't catch anything. We'll go visit him tomorrow, and I'll talk with Midoriya-san about replacing his phone so you can stay in contact. Just don't text him cat pictures at all hours, okay kid?"

Hitoshi gave a watery laugh and slumped further into his side.

“And when he’s back to his usual self, we’re going to have a talk with the kid about disappearing on us and running straight into villain attacks.” Shouta had already jotted down his main talking points. He was tempted to make a powerpoint.

“You’re gonna tell him to run at the villain from behind,” Hitoshi predicted, pulling back slightly to meet Shouta’s eyes.

Heh.

“The best attack is a sneak attack,” he agreed, nodding seriously. Hitoshi rolled his eyes and raised a sleeve to dry his face. Shouta picked up his mug and handed it back to him. “Will you be able to sleep any more tonight?”

Hitoshi grimaced and bent over his mug, cradling it close. “Can we put something on? I just… don’t want to think.”

Shouta nodded. “Disney or documentary?”

TV set on a low murmur as it crooned about wild and domesticated birds, Hitoshi and Shouta piled the couch with blankets. The cats piled themselves. The DVD player went to sleep, logo bouncing gently around the corners of the screen as the first fingers of dawn crept through the window shades.

Hizashi stumbled past the family room on his way to the coffee machine, and took a moment to turn off the TV and put a pillow under Shouta’s head where it lolled off the side of the couch. Hitoshi

was out cold against his partner's shoulder, hands loosely holding a long-empty mug. Hizashi gazed at them both for a moment, then padded away to fill the cats' bowls and prepare the coffee.

Back when they'd first talked about taking in the silent, traumatized kid Shouta had rescued, Hizashi had been… not skeptical exactly, but somewhat uncertain, of whether his partner's blunt attitude and his own exuberance would help the kid feel safe. Neither of them had anything approaching parenting experience, and it had felt like they were diving blindly into the deep end to keep this fearful-eyed kid from drowning. It had taken a long time before Hitoshi would do anything but flinch when they got close.

This wasn't the first time their kid had nodded off on one of their shoulders, but every time he saw it he felt a lump in his throat. His family may have started out small, awkward and uncertain, but where it mattered, they were rock solid.

You have (1) new message. Press (1) to listen to your message.

1

"Hisashi? It's me. I-- I was wondering if you could call. Tomorrow? Morning or night, it's fine, I just. Izuku was-- he was attacked by a villain. H-He's in the hospital. I-- The doctors say he's okay. He *drowned* but… he's breathing okay now. I just-- I know you're busy, but I need you to call me. I'll be at the hospital tomorrow, you can speak to Izuku then. I think he'd really like to hear from you. I would, too. I know you're working hard for all of us. I--"

*Message recorded at 11:30 pm, Friday. Press (1) to listen to this

message again. Press (2) to listen to the next message. Press (3) to delete. Press (4) for more--*

3

Your message has been deleted.

Chapter End Notes

aaaa I wrote it but I still feel horrible for Hitoshi and Izuku.
Upcoming: a Talk for hitoshi and Izuku about picking their fights.

Sneak Peek:
Hitoshi: Izuku, you should maybe pick your fights?
Izuku: Okay, I've picked.
Hitoshi: Izu. Izu this is all of them YOU CAN'T ANSWER D) ALL OF THE ABOVE FOR FIGHTS
Izuku: (ง'-')ง

Okay okay this is not an update but I think I know what Izuku's (new) screen name should be now, are you ready?

FiveFootFightMe

Okay thank you you can go (and especially thank you for all your suggestions, I loved them!)

Visits

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The shit-nerd wasn't in school on Monday.

Not that Katsuki was waiting for him or anything. He'd just noticed when the teacher reached the fuck's name on roll call and grimaced. Nerd was probably just scared shitless of that villain still. *Katsuki* was the one who'd been caught by the fuck, and *he* wasn't missing class, but whatever. Deku always was a fucking pussy.

Noburu and Kurokawa Twig Fingers and Neck Boy were sticking to him at lunch like nothing had happened on Friday, like they'd never run away and left him, just sat there whispering between themselves. He couldn't give less of a fuck, pouring hot sauce onto his curry.

"--but what if Deku really did it?" Twig Fingers whispered, twisting his fingers together. "It's not… murder, is it?"

"They can't blame you for--" Neck Boy reared his head back as Katsuki rounded on them, fists sparking.

"Why. The fuck. Are you talking about Deku and *murder?* " he growled.

...

He didn't beat them up. He hadn't *touched* the fuckers, unless you counted when Neck Boy wanted to cut and run and he'd stuck his foot

out to trip him up. He wasn't even completely sure *why* he'd taken the time to pull them out of the classroom and make very, very clear what they were never going to say to Deku again. He hated the little fuck.

(He'd forgive you if you showed an ounce of--)

He *hated* the nerd, but he didn't want him dead.

Hitoshi tapped his foot anxiously, waiting for the bell to chime. He'd already gone to collect Izuku's homework assignments from the teachers' office during lunch, but he still had to grab something from Izu's desk before Aizawa picked him up.

His phone hadn't vibrated at all today. Hopefully that meant that Izu was feeling better, since Mrs. Midoriya had promised to let him know if his friend's fever got any worse. Aizawa had assured him his friend would be fine-- the doctors had put him on antibiotics as soon as they noticed the risk of pneumonia, and Izu would probably be completely better in two weeks. He'd offered to let Hitoshi take the day off from school to stay at the hospital, but Izuku hadn't wanted Hitoshi to miss class.

Still, though. Hitoshi chewed on his lip, remembering how he'd arrived at Izu's room Sunday morning to find his friend staring blearily at the ceiling, tears dripping silently from the corners of his eyes. He hadn't been able to do anything but grip Izu's hand until his friend stopped shivering and turned a watery, wobbling smile his way.

I'm fine, Izu had signed weakly with his left. *Tired.*

“You can go to sleep now if you want,” Hitoshi had murmured.

Izuku had winced and started coughing again. *Too tired, too loud. You talk?*

“Uh… sure.” Hitoshi hadn’t really known what to say, but somehow he’d rambled on until his throat was sore and the tight lines around Izu’s eyes had finally eased.

“I’m running out of words, but I think that show is on again, if you want?” he’d offered, hoarse. And so he and Izuku had watched the continuing machinations of a vengeful scribe against the noble family that had killed his father, until finally Izu’s hand fell slack in Hitoshi’s grip and his eyes closed. He’d had to text Kouji one-handed after that, but that was fine. He hadn’t needed both hands to plot.

Hitoshi was out of his seat the moment the dismissal bell chimed. Izuku’s classroom wasn’t too far away from his, he waited impatiently for the flood of students to clear before barging in. Now he just needed to--

Shit.

Where was Izuku’s desk again?

“Oi, purple fuck, what are you doing here?”

And of course Katsuki Fucking Bakugou was still here.

Hitoshi scowled. “Izu forgot his pencil case last Friday. Didn’t tell me where he sits though...” He scanned the rows of desks. Couldn’t they at least put name tags? He'd have texted Izu to ask which row he sat in, but his friend’s phone situation still hadn’t been resolved.

“Where *is* the fucking nerd?” Bakugou was glaring at his phone, purposely avoiding Hitoshi’s eyes.

“In the hospital, dickhead,” Hitoshi threw back. Seriously, the asshole couldn’t even let up on the insults after Izu had saved his life?

“He’s *what?!* ” Bakugou looked ready to start a shouting match. Hitoshi didn’t have time for this. Or, frankly, the fucks to spare.

Channeling Aizawa, he turned to the asshole and *glared.* “Look. I don’t care whatever the fuck you have against Izu for *saving your life*. You weren’t the only one that villain attacked that day. Izu nearly suffocated before I managed to get him free. So yeah! He’s in the hospital cuz they’re worried about pneumonia and he’s got a fever and he isn’t sleeping right, and I’m on my way to visit him as soon as I find his *fucking pencil case*. So if you could reign in the dickishness for ONE MINUTE--”

Bakugou scoffed and looked away. “It’s number 24.”

Hitoshi threw up his hands, “*Thank* you!”

It didn’t take him long to grab the All-Might patterned pencil case from desk #24, but the sudden silence in the room made the back of his neck prickle. He straightened up. “Well, I’ll be on my way.”

Bakugou sneered at him half-heartedly. “Just… tell the little bitch I still think he’s a pussy for not being able to sleep without his headphones,” he muttered.

Hitoshi rolled his eyes and started to leave.

Wait.

Headphones, huh?

Grudgingly, he turned back. “...Thank... you?”

Bakugou actually snarled and started forward at that. Hitoshi gave up.

“Have a nice life, I guess.” Throwing a peace sign over his shoulder, he started towards the front gates. Aizawa was already waiting, but they had time to head home before picking up Kouji from the vet’s. Aizawa practically collected noise-cancelling headphones for his headaches, he wouldn’t mind lending a pair for a good cause.

Kouji had been visiting hospitals since he was nine years old, but this was the first time he would be going to visit a friend. It was somewhat weird, that it made him nervous. He’d been to pediatrics wards, senior centers, even a university one time-- pretty much anywhere that people needed some down time with cuddly animal companions. It wasn’t that scary after the first few times, when he’d been worried people might make fun of him for not talking. The sign he usually

carried with him helped. He'd found that no one really cared about making conversation when you could just hand them a puppy and show them to a pillow.

Maybe it was just the disconnect, the fact that this time he wasn't Volunteer Kouda accompanying Therapy Animal Trainer Kouda, but just Kouji, here to visit Izuku. The hospital was the same, the warm heavy weight in his arms was the same, but on the other side of that door was his friend who'd nearly died.

Aizawa rested a hand on his shoulder as they neared the room. "His fever's gone down a little since this afternoon. Just remember not to excite him too much, okay kids?"

He gulped and nodded. Hitoshi, scrolling through his phone's camera settings to start recording, gave a distracted hum of agreement.

"Good." Aizawa smirked down at them. "Hitoshi."

With a noise of triumph, Hitoshi raised his phone to frame Kouji and his precious cargo.

"Operation 'What's Up Doc' is go!" he whispered.

Kouji swallowed a nervous giggle and led the way into Izuku's room. The lights were dimmed, but his friend was awake, blinking slowly at the ceiling. He tapped his foot gently.

"Ah--K-Kouji?" Izu stammered, pushing himself upright, "Is-- W-wait, d-d-do you have--?"

Very carefully, Kouji shifted a hand to tap the laminated sign around his neck. '*This is Yuwai, a fully licensed therapy rabbit. He likes hugs.'*

Hitoshi was just in time to catch Izu's expression as blunt fatigue melted from his eyes, and he began to smile. Kouji stepped forward and gently placed Yuwai in Izuku's outstretched arms, shifting his friend's elbows slightly to hold the rabbit more comfortably. Izu gazed down at the chubby white bunny, and Yuwai gazed back up at him with shiny pink eyes. His pink nose twitched.

Izuku pressed his lips together and slumped forward slightly, whining quietly at the cuteness overload. Yuwai blinked at him, then butted his head against Izuku's bicep, prompting a startled squeak.

"How do you like your surprise?" Hitoshi asked, hushed. Izuku managed to tear his eyes away from the contented bunny in his arms.

"Y-y-you guys--" He was smiling, even as tears started to roll down his cheeks. "H-H-He's *so cute!* How did-- did you bring him--?" He muffled a cough in his elbow.

Kouji scratched at the back of his neck, blushing slightly. *I asked the h-o-s-p-i-t-a-l if it was OK,* he signed. *Hitoshi and I planned it.*

Hitoshi shrugged, not bothering to hold the phone steady. "You seemed kinda down this weekend, Kouji thought you could do with some bunny cuddles."

Kouji nodded seriously. *Cuddles are the best medicine.*

“So.” Hitoshi brought the phone closer, framing Yuwai’s plump body. “For our viewers at home, how would you rate your cuddling experience. One out of ten, Izu, with one being ‘could cuddle more’ and ten being ‘kitty pile on blankets straight from the dryer.’”

Izuku raised a hand to gently pat Yuwai’s velvety head. “T-Ten out of ten,” he murmured.

Satisfied, Hitoshi ended the video and plonked himself down in a chair. “Well, keep up the cuddles, because I brought our history homework and it. is. Heinous.”

Kouji took a seat at Izuku’s other side, offering Yuwai a hand to sniff. *I brought homework too,* he added when Izuku looked his way.

Aizawa spoke up from the doorway. “Remember you only get a couple hours of visit time, kids. So,” he pointed at Hitoshi and Kouji, “homework first,” and switched to Izuku, “and you just pet the bunny. Got it?”

Hitoshi saluted. Kouji followed, after a beat.

“And kid,” Aizawa added. “Where’d your mother go?”

Izuku’s smile died. “S-she… had to make a call.” He’d thought she was in the hall outside, but she might have gone further. Mom didn’t like standing still when she was on the phone.

Aizawa nodded and strode out of the room. Izuku turned to Hitoshi, “Wh-what--?”

“He was talking in the car about grilling the doctors about when you can go home,” Hitoshi offered. “Since you said you hadn’t been sleeping.” He could tell last night had been no picnic either, even Izuku’s hair seemed less perky than normal. “Oh! But we brought something for that too.”

He set Aizawa’s spare noise-cancelling headphones on the bedside table, next to a half-eaten cup of jello. Izuku looked ready to burst into tears again at the gesture.

Kouji tapped his shoulder and gestured at his pillows. *Yuwai says to lie down,* he informed Izuku. Actually, it was more along the lines of **pillow flat please stop moving pillow** but Izuku didn’t need to know that. Kouji fluffed the (literal) pillows slightly before pressing gently at Izuku’s shoulder. Once his friend was fully reclined, Yuwai chuffed happily and shuffled forward to rest his paws against the boy’s sternum.

“Th-th-that ti-tickles,” Izuku giggled, as Yuwai snuffled at his chin. Kouji and Hitoshi exchanged a glance. Hitoshi got out his phone again.

“Okay, Izu, if you could rate your tickling experience from one to ten--”

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was tentatively titled "But Sir This Is My Emotional Support Hurt/Comfort Chapter"

Katsuki gets a cameo because Trauma and also he kind of needed to know what went down before his attack. I also may have accidentally made him somewhat tsundere, but... shh just roll with it.

Izuku is sensitive to sound, which is great for when he wants to

analyze heroes' speech patterns and absolutely terrible when he needs to fall asleep in an unfamiliar setting. He does not have pneumonia (sorry if that wasn't clear) but he has a flu that could possibly turn into pneumonia if the antibiotics don't kick in first.

Kouji's rabbit is indeed named Yuwai, I did Research for this. Yuwai can mean 'Blessing,' which is a terrific name for a bunny. Therapy animals are allowed in (some) hospitals, but not normally for short visits unless they're visiting their owner. Yuwai gets a pass because he visits the hospital once a month with Kouji as part of a therapy animal program and therefore he's certified to visit any patient that isn't allergic.

This update took longer than usual because a) I got sick (fun times) and b) I fell into the Mo Dao Zu Shi fandom. Sorry for the delay and thank you for reading!!

Message

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Hisashi, if you could pick up the damn-- no. Hisashi, maybe if you checked your voicemail more than once a month, you’d realize that your son is-- Ugh. Hisashi, I know you’re busy but would it kill you to-- Damn it!” She sighed sharply. “Would it be too much to say ‘Our kid is in the hospital, pick up the fucking phone or suffer the consequences?’” Inko muttered viciously, glaring at the silent phone in her hands. Most likely. No matter how much she wanted to, leaving such an angry message would be…

“Probably not,” a low, pleasant voice answered from beside her. Inko jumped in her seat, pressing a hand against her racing heart. She hadn’t thought anyone would hear her in this corner of the waiting room. Inko turned to meet kind grey eyes and gentle laughter. “Sorry for startling you,” the woman said.

“I-i-it’s fine,” she stammered. The other woman smiled, pushing her long white hair behind her ears as she took a seat. Inko surveyed her neighbor’s downy wool coat and loose clothing. Somehow, even though the ensemble was a soft sky blue, it seemed... colorless. Inko winced, coming back to herself. “I shouldn’t have been speaking to myself… I’m sorry if it bothered you.”

The woman waved a hand, brushing aside the apology. The paper identification bracelet around her wrist crinkled slightly. “You seemed upset. I just thought-- I have a while to wait before my consultation. If you need someone to talk to…”

So she was here for an appointment? From her clothing, Inko had unconsciously assumed she was an in-patient. Inko’s eyes were drawn back down to her silent phone.

“I… Thank you for your concern. I shouldn’t trouble you,” she began, trying to keep her voice steady. She’d been so wrapped up in her frustration with Hisashi, she’d forgotten this was a public area. “Um…”

“Call me Rei,” the woman invited, soft-voiced. “And it’s no trouble. I heard you mention your son-- I just--” Her smile was somewhat bitter. “I know, in your situation, I would have wanted… someone to talk to, so--”

Inko felt her face crumple and groped in her purse for her handkerchief. Rei’s eyes widened. “Oh dear,” she murmured.

“I-- It’s nothing, I’m fine,” Inko tried to say, face hot. She’d been crying so much lately, the tears just wouldn’t stop, even though she was angry, angry at her silent phone and her silent husband, and the villain who’d sent her boy to that silent white room, she didn’t *want* to be crying again, and why did it have to be in front of this kind stranger? “I’m really… fine. It’s fine, it’s okay,” she continued, voice breaking.

Rei bit her lip, and slowly, slowly reached across their seats to set her hand on Inko’s. Her fingers were cold. “You’re okay,” she murmured.

Inko nodded miserably, scrubbing at her cheeks with her free palm.

“You’re okay,” Rei repeated, squeezing her hand lightly. “And if you’re *not* okay… that’s fine, too.” She glanced at Inko and then away, politely. Like she knew the feeling, of biting down fear and anger and disappointed hopes and regret, of strangling that roiling mess of feeling in the pit of your chest until it clawed at your throat, of desperately struggling to keep smiling past the bitter words you

wanted to scream, until finally... you failed. Like she knew, too, that the only thing worse than failing was to have someone watch as you fell apart.

Inko curled forward, helplessly. Izuku had been in the hospital almost four days now, and every day the dark bags under his eyes grew deeper. He was *okay*, well, somewhat, he was *safe*, but. He'd been in the hospital four days now, and her husband hadn't answered a single call.

"I--" She gulped, trying to even her breathing. "I just-- My husband."

"Mm." Rei hummed in quiet acknowledgement.

"He's. He works abroad. He's *been* abroad. For years." She wiped her face again. "Since Izuku was… since he turned four. He calls, we talk on the phone, but. Izuku hasn't seen him in, in *years* . He's grown so much and Hisashi never-- and now he's in the hospital! He was attacked by a villain!" Inko's hands clenched, crushing her handkerchief. Rei's hand tightened against hers. "He-- He could have been *killed!* And I keep calling and calling, and Hisashi hasn't-- He's his *father!* " Her voice was probably too loud for a hospital waiting room, but she no longer cared. "And his friend, his friend was there, and his parents-- they've come to visit *every day.* And his own father won't even--" She took a deep breath and blew it out, slowly, shakily. There really was nothing more to say. Hitoshi's fathers came to visit Izuku every day, even though she knew they were both working. They brought Hitoshi to visit, and they brought little thoughtful gifts, and they sat in that awful room with her son and stayed until he was smiling.

They came every day.

Hisashi hadn't returned a single call.

Inko sighed. “I just worry-- what does that say to Izuku? He’s been hurt, been attacked… and his father doesn’t respond... at all.” All she wanted to do was go back to Izuku’s room and hug him tight, but. She was still so, so angry.

“Sometimes…” Rei glanced at her and then away. “Sometimes it’s hard. Reaching out. He… could be afraid. Of how… your son might react. After all this time.”

Inko narrowed her eyes. “Too damn bad,” she said bluntly.

Rei’s eyes widened. Inko set her jaw.

“It’s too damn bad if he’s scared. If he wants to apologize. If he misses us. If he’s tired, or unhappy at work, or coming down with a cold-- it’s not an excuse. Not now. Izuku’s scared too. But he still… he *deserves* to hear from his father. Kids aren’t mind-readers! Generally, I mean. *Our son* isn’t a mind-reader. So…” she swallowed, “if Hisashi cares at all, he needs to show it. He has to call, or send a letter, or actually *come home*. How is Izuku supposed to know, if Hisashi never tries to tell him?” Without thinking, she turned her phone on again.

No new calls.

Obviously.

Rei stared at her for a long moment, and nodded slowly. Inko took a deep breath and dredged up a smile from somewhere. She didn’t feel any better. It wasn’t like saying it aloud had solved anything. If anything, it was more like kneading a knotted muscle to relieve a cramp, or pressing a hand to aching eyes. The pain didn’t stop, but at

least you reached the source.

"I. I'll call him one more time," she decided. "One *last* time. And if he doesn't answer… if he doesn't have a good *reason* not to answer..." She felt sick. Tired, almost nauseous with fatigue. If after all this, he didn't answer…

Rei's hand was cold against hers. She gripped it, unthinking.

The other woman didn't say a word. She sat, cold hand steady on Inko's, for a long, unbroken moment.

"You're brave," she murmured, when Inko's breathing had steadied and her eyes were dry. "You love your son, and… you're here for him." She patted Inko's hand once as if to say 'that's enough,' and stood up before the nurse at the reception desk could call her name.

In the corner, an attending nurse Inko hadn't noticed stood up to follow the woman out of the waiting room. It seemed he'd been sitting there the entire time.

… Odd.

Her phone vibrated in her hands. She bit back a bitter smile as she answered.

"Aizawa-san... Thank you for calling. I'm in the waiting room, sorry, I'll be right back... Waiting on a call. Yes, the doctors said he can come home as early as this Wednesday." She packed her handkerchief away and stood.

She stopped.

"...Kouji brought a *what?*"

Chapter End Notes

I've accepted it, the All Might chapter is just... it's gonna be a while. This chapter is dedicated to my best friend since kindergarten who! gave me! BNHA merch! I'm so excited, I've never actually had anime merch before and it is the absolute coolest thing.

On a slightly more serious note: not intending to draw a parallel between Hisashi and Rei as parents here. They operate on very different reasoning, even if their (in)action to their sons is similar. Hisashi doesn't contact Izuku because *censored*. Rei doesn't contact Shouto because 1) she's in a mental institution and 2) she's afraid she'll hurt him again. Mainly it just seems like... she could have reached out to Shouto in some way, (explained? apologized? assured him he's not his father??) like sending letters to him through her other kids, before he came to visit her in person. And it's perfectly reasonable that she felt terrible and couldn't do that... but it's also possible she could meet someone who would inspire her to try.

(This may be making waaaaaaaaayy too much light of it but it kind of feels like:
Last chapter: Izuku Joins the Bad Dad Club
This chapter: Inko Joins the Terrible Husband Club)

The Todorokis: *rip open over-shirts in tandem*
Shouto: Bad Dad Club Founder
Rei: Terrible Husband Club Founder
Todorokis: *solemn nod*

Little Talks

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Women in our family are ice, she'd whisper to Fuyumi, on the nights when her husband wasn't home and her children pulled her into her daughter's room to sleep. Once Natsuo was born, Touya would smuggle his futon in to lay next to Fuyumi's, and they'd all snicker as they shifted to find the right configuration. Invariably, she and Fuyumi would end up bracketing Touya and Natsuo, their little space-heaters giggling as they fended off attacks from cold toes.

After stuffed animals were sufficiently cuddled, and pillows were fluffed according to preference. After whispered stories were breathed under the warm quilt pulled over all their heads. After the boys fell asleep and her daughter bit her lip and met her gaze, her own gray eyes reflecting back fear and helplessness, she'd reach across the boys' shoulders to clasp cold hands.

Women in our family are ice, she'd whisper, we are glacier-calm and ocean-deep, we carry cold and calm within us. Fire may burn down a forest, but ice has covered the Earth for centuries in the past, carved valleys through mountains in its wake, buried continents and oceans in bitter-cold calm. We may shift and change, we may melt and form anew. Yet at our core, we are winter, and fire cannot burn us.

She'd had time to think it over, in the mental ward. To think of how she'd whispered to her daughter, "Fire cannot burn us," and forgotten to mention how even glacial ice could be shattered.

Still.

The door read, "Dr. Kiyomine Akiyama, Clinical Psychology." She

knocked firmly, twice.

A deep male voice. “Come in.”

Breathing even, expression serene, she entered the doctor’s office and bowed. Cold, calm, precise.

“Doctor Akiyama. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me.”

She stepped further into the room, closing the door behind her with a click. Her supervising nurse shut firmly on the other side.

“I would like to discuss my medication,” Rei stated, ice-calm, and smiled.

Inko could have kissed the boys when she returned to see that Izuku had fallen asleep, a napping rabbit tucked firmly against his shoulder with his little whiskery face resting against her boy’s curls.

Hitoshi pointed gleefully at the dozing duo and whispered, “Kouji had to tell the bunny he couldn’t eat Izu’s hair. *Twice.* ”

Kouji, who Inko had never met in person before, blushed and bowed to her, signing, *Nice to meet you.*

She tried very hard not to coo at that pink face growing pinker. “It’s

nice to meet you too, dear," she murmured. "*Thank you* for coming to visit Izuku, I know he's thrilled. He's told me so much about you!" Mainly about his new friend's quirk, actually, but he'd been incredibly enthusiastic about its possible uses.

Kouji's pink face was rapidly approaching brick red. She took pity on the poor boy and turned to Aizawa, who sat watching them from the corner with a barely-there smirk.

"Thank you for bringing them to visit, Aizawa-san." As expected, the man just waved his hand dismissively in response. "You had… something you wanted to talk about?" Her shoulders rounded slightly, remembering that he'd actually been walking through the halls looking for her while she was crying all over that nice woman earlier.

Aizawa glanced at the bed. Kouji was occupied with keeping Hitoshi from decorating Izuku's arms with highlighters.

"Let's speak outside." Mentally, he noted that Izuku and his mother both seemed to become smaller and rounder when they were anxious about something. Someday the kid might stress himself into a marimo.

Once in the hallway, Inko folded her arms and turned to him, questioning.

"All Might contacted me," he stated bluntly. "He wanted to know when would be a good time for that apology."

Inko's jaw dropped. Aizawa replayed his words in his head and winced.

“All Might… contacted?” she repeated. “He… but you’re…”

Aizawa coughed. “I should say, he contacted Present Mic. Who told me. Naturally.” ‘Since I’m obviously a regular high school teacher and not a pro hero,’ he very carefully didn’t say. He didn’t bother trying to look innocent. Hizashi always said his face turned scary when he widened his eyes too much.

Inko scrutinized him. His expression didn’t shift.

“So. Scheduling?” he prompted.

“I assumed we would wait until after your son recovered. But I know his birthday’s coming up, and it would be best to have that all… resolved as quickly as possible.” Since some words left wounds, and your idol telling you you were basically worthless was a wound Aizawa would not leave untreated.

Yes, All Might hadn’t meant it like that. Yes, the words he’d said made logical sense, especially when you took into account he was trying to keep a thirteen-year-old from joining one of the most physically dangerous professions in the country. No, Aizawa would not forgive him for crushing Izuku’s dreams.

“I…” Inko pressed a hand to her mouth. “I’m only free on weekends,” she murmured. “But a pro hero’s schedule…”

“He said he’d make time,” Aizawa interjected. “Hizashi and I are willing to be there as well, if you would like.” Nemuri had also volunteered, but she’d been toying with her whip in a frankly disturbing way when they’d told her, so he and Hizashi had unanimously decided to keep her away from the Number One Hero for the foreseeable future.

"...Have you told Izuku?" she asked, looking back at the room. Hitoshi and Kouji seemed to have returned to their homework, in the absence of anything else to do. She'd never really seen the appeal of highlighters in studying, but Kouji seemed to be having fun.

He frowned. "I don't believe it's my place," he said slowly.

Inko's mouth twisted, but she nodded. "This weekend. If he's doing better, this Saturday should… work. I think we're good for coffee and tea, but I can buy some snacks on Friday. Or maybe small sandwiches would be better?" She mentally ticked off what they had in the cabinets, trying to figure out if they had enough food to feed, well, a pro hero. Judging by body mass, he probably ate as much as any five normal people in a day.

"I think he'd be fine with just your coffee," Aizawa rebutted, perfectly straight-faced.

"I suppose as a pro hero he probably controls his diet very well, so-- huh?" Inko glanced up from her muttering. "You think so?"

"M-hm. Black coffee, no sugar, I'd assume," he affirmed.

"I see." Inko's face firmed. "Then… if you could have Yamada-san contact him and say, Saturday afternoon, please. Any time that's convenient. And I'll… tell Izuku."

Preferably in a couple days. Since he'd been so tired and he was sleeping so peacefully.

Hitoshi and Kouji, silly boys, put away the highlighters and went back to their reading as soon as the adults re-entered the room. She glanced at her silent phone, then at her son asleep on the bed. He looked peaceful, not as tense and uncomfortable as she'd seen him these past few days. Maybe it was because his friends were here, maybe it was because of the warm furry weight on his chest, she was just happy he seemed to be feeling better.

She took a quick picture-- two pictures-- a couple photos later, she smiled at her phone and put it away in her purse. Her boy was safe, his friends were reading quietly at his side just to be there when he woke up... even at a time like this, she still had a lot to be grateful for.

You have reached the voicemail of Inko Midoriya. Please leave a message after the tone.

"Inko... honey. Hi. I'm sorry I missed your calls..."

Chapter End Notes

The start of this turned out strangely George R. R. Martin-y? Kind of like, ah yes, Rei Todoroki, short for Rhaella Targaryen, mother of the mother of dragons. Of the "Fire cannot burn a ____" family.

Which would make Fuyumi's full name Fuyumi Danearys "Stormborn The Unburnt Mhysa The Queen Across the Sea The Silver Queen The Dragon Queen The Dragon's Daughter" Targaryen (first of her name) Todoroki. I'm just going off the wiki page here.

(Following the analogy, Touya = Rhaegar, Natsuo = Viserys (poor todobro) and Enji would be the Mad King that likes to burn ppl alive with wildfire.)

So maybe I got a little carried away. Maybe.

Next chapter: another Meanwhile Kouji insert, because you can

never have too many!

Meanwhile Kouji: Making a List

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

In the hospital room, Hitoshi peered at the serious adult conversation happening in the hall and turned to face Kouji.

“So we’re agreed?” he whispered. Kouji glanced back at him, eyes fierce as he nodded. He held up his List.

No, really, they’d written a list. Hitoshi wanted to title it “Murder from Above,” but Kouji had argued him down to “The List.”

At Hitoshi’s pleading, he’d added “(murder)” to the end of the title, but everyone knew parentheses didn’t count.

Glancing to make sure Izuku was still asleep, Kouji added names to the list.

1. Death Arms
2. Kamui Woods
3.

Kouji glanced up and signed, *Were there more?*

Hitoshi grimaced. *A few, but those two yelled at him.*

Kouji’s eyes narrowed. He held out his hand towards Hitoshi, palm up.

Hitoshi tilted his head. Yuwai, whiskery nose tucked against Izuku's neck, let out a tiny grunting snore.

Kouji closed his hand and opened it a few times, then pointed. Hitoshi, enlightened, handed him the highlighters.

"Death Arms" and "Kamui Woods" were highlighted so viciously the ink began to bleed. Hitoshi smirked.

The highlighting increased.

"...You won't actually kill them, right?" he whispered.

Kouji glanced up. *I won't interfere with their jobs,* he promised.

Hitoshi mused that that wasn't exactly a 'no.' Then, he took a moment to consider.

"...You know," he whispered. "They weren't the only two heroes to talk down to Izuku that day."

Kouji raised his pen.

In the end, an ominously highlighted slip of paper lay tucked in Kouji's math notebook.

“The List (murder)”

1. Death Arms
2. Kamui Woods
3. ALL MIGHT
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.

Kouji had decided to leave some slots open, just in case.

Chapter End Notes

Nearly stuck this in the last chapter, but that would have really wrecked the whole "serious" vibe. Anyway, this is what the boys were up to when Inko and Aizawa had their talk.

The "listed" heroes: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3sED3T6Hm8

Edit: Since I probably should have clarified further in the chapter, The List (murder most fowl) is not an actual hit list. It is a Shit List.

... Yup, Kouji's plan is to have birds follow these heroes around and, ahem, "bomb" them when they're off-duty. This has the added benefit of not being easily identifiable as "villainous activity," and does not impede on their work.

Another thing I find hilarious: Japan actually has a really high population of crows? I'm pretty sure it's illegal to feed them in certain cities, they just have. A ton. Of crows. So basically, Kouji can stage a live action filming of The Birds at any moment he so chooses.

Meanwhile Kouji: (◡‿◡✿)
Meanwhile Kouji: (ʘ‿ʘ✿)
Meanwhile Kouji: (ʘ‿ʘ✿) □□□□□□□□□□□□

Be afraid, heroes. Be very, very afraid.

These Nightmares Always Outlast the Dream

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Feet pounding on asphalt, harsh breaths rasping. A cold wind tearing at the back of his throat. A dim light in front of him, blind darkness behind. A hand clasped tightly around his wrist, lagging slightly as they ran.

Something was behind them, in the darkness, in the deep, something was approaching to gnaw at their heels and swallow them whole. He knew it was there, although he couldn't spare the breath to turn and see its face.

The monster behind him would kill them. That dim light ahead stayed distant, even as they ran towards it desperately. Like strobe-light flashes, he remembered-- his mother, they had run to his mother first, to shelter in their apartment and shut the door. The monster had seeped under the crack of the door.

Mom had looked at them and screamed for them to run.

They ran. Throat choked with sobs, not daring to look back, aching with the surety that ***she's gone, gone, the last person who loved me is gone.***

"Dad," his friend gasped, hand tightening against his wrist. "We've gotta… find Dad…!"

With a sudden jerk, he stumbled.

His hand--

tore free as he fell.

Izuku turned, heart in his throat.

Blank eyes stared back at him in his friend's slack face. The dark surrounded him, swallowed him, stole him away.

A deep gurgling voice like a sewer drain.

"You didn't really think you could get away, did you?"

.

.

.

Izuku thrashed himself awake, drenched in cold sweat. The monitor at his bedside was beeping furiously. He struggled to sit upright, hands shaking. He'd seen-- Hitoshi had-- and his mom was--

In the gloom of the hospital room, completely alone, he couldn't help curling up as the first sob tore through him. Crying his grief and fear, even though he knew they weren't gone, even though they were probably fine, the fear had overtaken his dream and followed him awake.

“Midoriya-kun. Midoriya. Shhhh, fledgling, just breathe through it.” The nurse on night-shift had arrived.

Izuku covered his face with his hands, almost dislodging the oxygen mask. His shoulders wouldn’t stop trembling.

Nurse Ootori took a moment to turn down the sound on the raucous monitor. He heard the slight rustle as she sat by his bedside. “Come on, fledgling, talk to me. Does it hurt? Are you having trouble breathing?”

Izuku shook his head miserably.

“Then… did you have a nightmare?” Her voice was humming-bird soft.

He curled up further. Nurse Ootori sighed.

“Talking can help,” she offered. After knowing the kid less than a week, she knew he wouldn’t let her call his parents. Even though his mother and the perpetually-half-asleep man she had first assumed was his father had both left their phone numbers with her ‘just in case.’

“I-I-I’m ok-okay,” Izuku whispered. Nurse Ootori watched as he tried to subdue the tremors. Tamping down another sigh, she ducked out of the room and gathered supplies from the cabinet in the hall.

“Shirt, pants, socks, warm washcloth,” she listed, re-entering. “Wash up first, then I’ll come in and change the sheets, alright?” Even if he

hadn't sweated all that much, she was firmly of the belief that the best cure for nightmares was clean, dry blankets and a warm drink.

Izuku whispered a thank-you and took the stack of clothing she set by his side. Nurse Ootori left again, this time for the blanket warming cabinet. By the time she returned, Izuku's face was dry, his clothes were changed, and he was wrestling a no-slip sock over his foot.

His head snapped up as she knocked on the door-frame. His cheeks turned red. "I-I'm sorry for, for the trouble--" he started.

"No trouble, kid, it's a slow night." She winked. "Besides, I'm a night owl." As the kid shifted to sit in the chair next to his bed, she quickly and efficiently stripped the bed.

Just like every other time she'd made that joke, Izuku groaned and covered his face. "J-just because you have a-- an avian quirk doesn't m-mean you c-can--"

"Make owl the bird puns?" She finished, cocking her head to one side. The thick mane of dark brown and red feathers at the nape of her neck puffed up slightly with amusement.

"Y-you and Hi- Hicchan can **never** meet," Izuku said seriously. He was smiling, though, which meant it had worked. She gestured for him to get back on the bed and set the warm blankets across his legs. She took a seat next to the bed.

"Seriously, duckling." She took a moment to text the other on-duty nurse for the ward, 'Midoriya's room,' just to let her know where she'd gone. "This is the third nightmare this week. You know where nightmares come from, right?"

The kid shrugged, not meeting her eyes.

“They’re your brain’s way of trying to deal with trauma. Fear, stress, the things you try and push away when you’re awake-- your subconscious reminds you they’re still there. Something really scary happened to you,” she smiled sadly as the kid flinched. “It’s natural to be scared still.”

“It’s-- it’s not *me* ,” Izuku denied. “It’s-- he kills-- he kills--” His hands clenched on the blankets. “He kills Mom a-and Hicchan and I-- and I c-c-can’t *stop h-him.* ”

Ootori nodded slowly. “Kid, don’t take this the wrong way, but… you’re twelve.”

Izuku frowned at her. “I-I’m nearly fourteen!”

Ootori smirked. “My mistake. Kid, you’re *thirteen* .” She crossed one leg over the other and leaned back.

Izuku frowned harder. “S-so what?” he asked.

“ *So.* What’s the minimum age for pro heroes?”

“W-well, y-you can get a provisional license a-at fifteen, but y-you have to be eighteen to, to debut,” Izuku mumbled.

“And before they debut, what are the limitations on hero trainees?” She’d seen the kid’s hero notebooks the last time he’d had trouble sleeping, he definitely knew the answer.

“Th-they’re not allowed to take on a-advertisement jobs, negotiate o-or… f-fight with v-villains un-unsupervised.” His voice sank.

“Hmm,” Ootori hummed. “So, even kids who are older than you, with more training than you’ve had, aren’t supposed to be left to fight by themselves, huh?”

Izuku was silent.

“I think part of the reason you’ve been dreaming, is because you know that. You didn’t do anything wrong, but you ended up having to face a villain that never should have attacked you, fighting alone.” Ootori gentled her voice. “It’s okay to be afraid it’ll happen again.”

“I’m-- I’m not--” his hands twisted together, clenching hard. “I don’t--”

“But I want you to remember something, focus on it before you try to sleep.” Ootori smoothed her crest, the fine-feathered surface of her hands catching the hall light. “First of all, you faced that villain and you won. No,” she raised a hand as Izuku opened his mouth, “this isn’t arguable. You’re alive, your friends are alive, you *won.* ” She regarded him for a moment, golden eyes sharp.

Under her gaze, Izuku reluctantly nodded.

“Second, you are *not* alone. Based on what I hear about your friends’ visits, it is very possible you will never be alone again.” Her friend on

day shift had reported that one of them had even tried to leave a rabbit as the kid's overnight guard.

That actually got her one of the kid's wide, bashful smiles. Ootori chuckled.

"And third, it is absolutely fine to be afraid. I don't want you thinking it makes you weak, or wrong, that you're scared even after it's over. The part of your brain that keeps trying to tell you you're scared or that you should still be scared, I want you to think of it like a friend who's been attacked. What would you say if your friend came up to you and said, 'I keep having nightmares, even though I'm okay now, and it scares me.' Would it be different from what you're telling yourself now?" She watched as the kid bit his lip and crossed his arms. "Can you try that for me? Imagine they're sitting right next to you. What would you say?"

"It--" He took a deep breath and blew it out. "It's o-okay." Izuku swiped a hand against his eyes. "Y-y-you were… r-r-really brave. S-so it's o-o-o-kay. To b-be sc-scared now."

Ootori smiled. "Good."

Izuku gave her a watery smile in return, a silent 'thank you.'

Ootori waved a hand. "Now, I'm going to bring you some chamomile tea, and then I want you counting sheep again. Got it, owlet?"

Smiling even as tears kept falling, Izuku gave her a nod.

She pointed at him, "Keep that up and I'll be forced to bring you a

cookie, mister.”

In the end, two cookies and a cup of tea richer, Izuku finally fell into a deep sleep.

In another hospital.

She sat by the window, gazing absently at the full moon. With one-half dose of her quirk suppressant (‘these medications must be titrated, to prevent withdrawal symptoms, Mrs. Todoroki,’ Akiyama had cautioned), the most she could do at a time was send frost spider-webbing across the window-pane. Still, it was more than she’d been able to do in years.

The first victory she’d had in years.

The first thing she’d managed to take back, from everything she’d given up. Everything she’d assumed was lost forever.

Her own quirk, her own power.

She pressed a hand against the window, reinforcing the cob-web-thick layer of frost.

For the first time in years, Rei felt something close to free.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter title comes from Panic! At The Disco's "Impossible Year."

Nurse Ootori has an avian mutation quirk and specifically has the feather pattern of a "hawk-headed parrot" or "red fan parrot." (https://www.petguide.com/breeds/bird/hawk-headed-parrot/)
Yes, her last name basically translates to "Big Bird."
Unlike Hitoshi, the only puns she makes are bird-related.
Her actual quirk (I couldn't find a place to put it) is actually that she can switch between having normal bones and hollow bones. It's not all that useful outside of making her team of nurses always win the hallway piggy-back race championship.
The feathers and gold eyes are just cosmetic mutations.

This is absolutely the last chapter I plan to write with Izuku in the hospital. In this arc, at least. :)

And finally, an answer to what Rei was doing in the general hospital! She successfully petitioned to stop taking quirk suppressant medications.

Apologize

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

My dear-- Dear-- Shouto,

It feels like I've written this letter to you every day, if only in my mind.--
You don't have to forgive me, I understand if you hate me and don't--
When I realized what I'd done I wanted to--

If you don't want to read any further, I just want you to know, I will always love you. I am so sorry for hurting you, and for leaving you alone. And here's something I wish people had told me-- You did nothing, ***nothing*** *to deserve it.*

Rei hesitated over another line, then resolutely set her pen to the paper. Under her left hand lay a thick stack of papers, some crumpled and carefully straightened out again. All contained heartfelt words written in a delicate scrawl, peppered heavily with crossed-out lines.

Her daughter would arrive in a few hours, and she would leave with one precious, perfect letter.

An apology years overdue.

A letter to her son.

There was a reason All Might habitually carried a pack of notecards whenever he wore his nice suit, and that reason's name was Mrs. Ibarra.

Mrs. Ibarra was short, with long salt-and-pepper hair that fell in perfect, frizzy ringlets. Her voice was perpetually hoarse, and crackled like a spitting fire when she spoke. She always chose to call on people who didn't raise their hands when she asked for volunteers. If a student glanced at their note-cards for longer than ten seconds while giving a presentation, she would make them memorize the entire thing and present it to her the next day. When she was very, very angry, she would pull her lips back in a tight smile and stare the object of her ire into submission.

She was the best speaker UA ever hired to teach third-year students how to handle public relations.

Mrs. Ibarra made it very clear that even if they were not in uniform, any time when they were not alone in their own homes with the blinds drawn and the lights off was time when they were expected to behave like upright, mature, and compassionate public officials. **Or else.**

What Toshinori mainly remembered was her talk about apologies.

"You are going to mess up," she had stated bluntly, scouring the classroom with her gaze. "You will mess up in big and small ways no matter how hard you try, and if you are caught messing up, you will need to apologize. You should anyway, of course, but as a *hero* , if you are caught in a mistake, you *will* be forced to apologize if your agency has a single grain of common sense."

She raised her voice, scowling. "This is because your reputation, the degree of trust an average citizen feels when looking at your costume,

is the measure of your success in your career. It is the difference between a victim reaching out to you for help and a witness deciding to withhold evidence while answering your questions. When a hero apologizes, it is a promise to the people who rely on you to protect them: 'I will do better.' In order to do your job effectively and, hopefully, to be a halfway decent person, you will need to know how to apologize well."

She had run them through exercises to practice apologizing to their classmates and then in front of the whole class, gave entire sheets of scribbled feedback to each student, and ended up with a brief speech.

"If, as a hero, you EVER stand in front of a camera and read out a canned apology statement your public relations team has written for you, I *will* rise from the grave to smack the stuffing out of you, and it *will* be caught on film," Mrs. Ibarra promised grimly. "Apologies are not difficult. Good apologies revolve around three basic points. One, I acknowledge what I did was wrong. Two, I regret that you were harmed. Three, this is how I plan to make sure it does not happen again. That's all. Apologies are easy." Then she'd glanced at them all again, evaluating. "And if you become very, very good at your job... they will be the absolute hardest thing you ever do."

All Might smoothed his notecards inside his jacket pocket, cradled the box of cakes he'd bought from Chiyo's favorite bakery (the only bribe that would make her stop scowling at him after he aggravated his injury, and the source of his largest monthly expenses outside of necessities) and took a deep breath.

Here's what I did wrong. Here's how it hurt you. Here's how I plan to make it up to you.

He rapped gently at the door with the "Midoriya" nameplate (bookended with two fading stickers of a flower and his own face, he noted with a wince).

Mrs. Midoriya was a tiny figure in a pink cardigan. She ushered him in politely, took the cake box from his hands with a bow and courteous thanks, and laid out the largest pair of guest slippers for his use. She did not smile at him.

All Might balanced carefully on too-small slippers as he followed her into the kitchen.

Aizawa and the kid were already seated. With a blanket around his shoulders and a mug of tea held loosely in his hands, the kid somehow looked even smaller than he had on that rooftop.

All Might settled into the seat Mrs. Midoriya indicated, and bowed his head. “Thank you for agreeing to meet with me, Midoriya-kun.”

The kid startled, clutching his mug to his chest before meeting All Might’s eyes with a trembling smile. With his round cheeks and wide eyes, and the mug held nearly chin-level, Midoriya looked… remarkably like a chipmunk nervously clutching a seed.

“Th-th-there’s no n-need to, to--” the kid gulped. “It-it’s fine.”

Toshinori’s smile softened. Aizawa’s dead-eyed stare felt like it was beginning to burn a hole in the side of his face.

Mrs. Midoriya set a steaming mug of black coffee at his right and took a seat.

Toshinori cleared his throat. “Ahem. I… did not act as a hero should,

when we first met. I had a duty to apprehend the villain and ensure your safety as his victim, and I failed both. I cannot apologize enough for having put you in danger."

Midoriya dropped his eyes and nodded.

"But what I most need to apologize for is… when you asked me if you could be a hero. I made an assumption about you, and based on that assumption, I tried to tell you your dream was unrealistic. I told myself that it was to protect you from getting hurt. But really, it was…" he held back a bitter laugh. "...Grossly hypocritical of me. Especially since, not five minutes later, you proved me wrong."

He waited for Midoriya to meet his eyes before he went on. "Top heroes, when you ask them how they get started, there's one thing they all have in common. They saw someone in trouble, and they moved to help before they had a chance to think. That's how it was for you, wasn't it?"

Midoriya's lower lip trembled. He nodded.

"I'm sorry for doubting you, my boy." All Might grinned. "I believe you can definitely become a hero. And, with your parents' permission of course... I would be honored if you would accept my help while you are in training."

The poor kid started overflowing at the eyes. Aizawa, sighing softly like this happened every day, handed him a handkerchief. And then another handkerchief.

"Ahem." All Might politely looked away and took a sip of his coffee. "--!"

He coughed slightly louder and put the coffee down.

Mrs. Midoriya, by his side, whispered a quiet “thank you.”

Her smile was small but lovely.

At last, the kid wiped his face and took a shuddering breath, cheeks bright red. “Th-thank you, sir, um, A-All Might! R-Really, it, um. It m-means a lot! I'd-- um-- yes! Please!”

Mrs. Midoriya gave her kid a helpless smile and nodded at his pleading eyes.

All Might laughed. “I’m glad. I’m only sorry it took so long for you to hear it.” He patted nervously at his pocket, remembering the other matter he’d come about.

“This… may seem like a strange question, my boy, but I was hoping to hear your thoughts.” Toshinori paused, glancing at Aizawa and his potential successor’s mother. “If you could… be given a quirk. Would you accept it?”

Chapter End Notes

> Most teachers: So this is the end of our time together, here’s my contact information if you want to stay in touch.
> Mrs. Ibarra: I’ll be watching over you from beyond the fucking veil, be prepared to deal with my furious, reanimated corpse.
>
> ---
> Co-starring: the adults Izuku meets and the animals they automatically compare him to--
> Aizawa: He’s a cat.

Yamada: Like a sunflower/puppy hybrid!
Midnight: Probably a rabbit, look at that jump height.
Ootori: Fledgling.
Yagi: Chipmunk. Definitely a chipmunk.

Later, when the kiddos find out--
Izuku: *muttering to himself* ...Maybe I have a latent quirk that affects perception somehow?
Hitoshi: *patting his shoulder consolingly* Nah, you're just adorable.
Kouji: *scrolling through phone*
Kouji: 'This is you.'
https://images.app.goo.gl/mXdFgr7erCwEdE4v9
Izuku: … *gasp*
Izuku: I have been betraitored.

Edit: For some reason, my writing process (almost without fail) has come to look like this: outline chapter. Write the first half. Mmmm, not quite there yet. Dither for a few days. Shrug and write a bit more. On the drive home, suddenly be hit by a flash of inspiration! Making everything you've already written extraneous. Toss it to the google doc for orphaned background scraps, re-write, edit, post.

Yes, it is literally without fail ALWAYS that same stretch of road on my route. Not every day, but often enough.

Today, Timbalake's "Apologize" came on just as I made the turn. 'Nuff said.

The Offer

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“What. Did. You. Say?” Aizawa’s voice was poisonously calm.

“Haha, a hypothetical question--” All Might’s grin never faltered, even as Aizawa leaned forward, glaring daggers.

“Aizawa-san, All Might-san…” His mother’s hands fluttered as she tried to settle them down.

“No, I want to know *why* he decided to ask--”

Izuku closed his eyes. His chest, his throat, the light ball of hope behind his sternum, pulled tight. Like he’d been punched in the stomach. Like when Hitoshi had pulled him from the slime and he’d choked for air. Like when he’d stood on a rooftop, heart in his hands, shouted out a question and--

There was a book written for toddlers. It used to be his favorite bedtime story. “Someday This Could Be You!” by Lila Sekikawa. There were lots of rhyming verses like “Will you walk up walls? Will you soar through the sky? Will you morph your face, to match those passing by? This could be you someday!”

Izuku had been digging through his book shelf to clear some space for his old notebooks, and that bright cover with an illustration of a curly-haired little girl in a beach towel cape caught his eye. He remembered staring at the well-worn cover and thinking, *‘They should write a quirkless version and call it ‘Ha Ha, This Will Never Be You.’*

Did he want a quirk?

He used to practice holding his breath in the bath, so he'd be able to breathe flame like Mom said his Dad could.

He used to squint at his All Might night light when Mom turned the lights out, reaching out a hand and hoping for it to come flying towards him.

He and Kacchan would debate over lunch whether super strength or super speed were better in a fight, and Kacchan would laugh at him for saying Healing was the best! quirk! ever!

He'd wished on birthday candles, on fireflies, on the meteor shower when he was ten and at the temple every New Year's, cold hands clasped as he prayed that his mom would be healthy and happy in the new year, that school would be okay, and that, if possible, maybe, somehow--

Did he want a quirk?

Had there ever been *anything* he had longed for *more?*

He looked at his hero.

All Might's smile was starting to look more like a grimace, but his gaze was steady.

Aizawa had stood up and was leaning over the table to glare at him, looking startlingly like Hitoshi about to round on one of Izuku's bullies.

Izuku tentatively grabbed at his sleeve and tugged gently backwards. It was… nice? That his friend's dad was angry for him. But he didn't want it right now.

"U-um. I-- I've thought about it, um, a lot?" he tried. Years. Years of wondering what he'd done wrong to be born *like this* instead of, well, the kid that his parents would have wanted more. "A-and. I." Had always thought it was *so cool*, even when he knew he'd never have one. Because they were. Quirks were so, so cool. Of course he'd thought about the possibility, that there might somewhere be a quirk to give other people powers.

"I-I know what people s-say. About, about p-people like me." Quirkless, useless, pathetic, *worthless.* "A-and I've a-always wanted to prove them wr-wrong." To have Kacchan actually *look* at him again, instead of glaring and dismissing him. To have teachers believe him when he said something happened. To go a *day* without some classmate laughing behind his back at poor, stupid *Deku*.

He'd always, always wanted to be the same as everyone else. To have the same chance as every other kid, to have the power to save people.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm so, so sorry, Izu-kun."

But-

"*You can't say you're not special. If you can look at quirks and see their weaknesses, you can definitely use that to save people."*

But-

Save the world one cat at a time. If I can be a hero, you can too.

But-

“I can’t say that you’ll make a great hero. I can’t tell you you’ll fulfill your dreams. But I can say this… If you learn, you will have an advantage that most heroes never discover.”

But that wasn’t what All Might had asked, was it?

———-

Shouto, I have spent years hating that man for what he did, hating myself for what I did to you. I hated my silence, I hated my fear, I hated my body, I hated my quirk. I hated everything about myself that he liked the most. I can’t say I know much, if anything, about how you’ve grown up, but I have the feeling that… you understand.

I won’t tell you not to hate him. Not to hate me. That is your right, to feel whatever it is that you feel. But I hope, I hope so much, that you never grow into the habit of hating yourself. I told you this once when you were very small, but I hope it will still help you now. You are not only your father’s son. You are not... bound by his blood. Or mine. Everything you were born with, everything you inherited from us, from the color of your hair to your quirk-- it is yours now. It is entirely your choice, what you decide to do, and who you decide to become. Whatever you decide, I will always be proud of you.

All my love,

Rei

Chapter End Notes

I... honestly can't tell if this is well-written or not? It was a Struggle.
But I am a tiny bit proud of the conclusion of Rei's letter.

The Choice

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“She called me, ya’know.” Torino-sensei’s voice had been blurred with alcohol, the only time Toshinori had ever seen him drunk. Nana’s memorial service, unattended by any member of her family. “The day she met ya. ‘*Sora, I found an idiot. He’s either gonna die young or save a lotta people*.’” His teacher had snorted into his soju and grinned a terrible smile.

“…Nah, that’s not how she put it. ‘*He’s gonna save a lotta people or die tryin’. I just gotta make sure he doesn’ get himself killed before he figures out what he’s doin*’.” Toshinori hadn’t known what to do with the look on Torino-sensei’s face. He wasn’t sure if his teacher even knew he was crying, large tears dripping into his beard. “Never figured she’d be gone before she’d finished the job.”

Separated from that moment by years and countless mistakes, Toshinori thought that he finally understood what his teacher had meant. That after searching and trying to judge who she could entrust this terrible privilege to, who she could trust to bear her legacy, she’d stumbled onto a kid no one else saw, and found potential.

He wondered, sitting across from Midoriya-kun and his fuming father, if she’d felt this way when she’d offered One for All to him, if anxiety and fear and bright, burbling hope had filled her until she was unable to speak.

He wondered if he had looked this small in her eyes, if she’d wondered if his shoulders were strong enough to bear the responsibility that came with immeasurable power.

Midoriya-kun's face was composed, but he wouldn't raise his eyes.

""U-um. I-- I've thought about it, um, a lot?" The boy's voice was high with nerves. "A-and. I-I know what people s-say. About, about p-people like me." He looked up, finally. "A-and I've a-always wanted to prove them wr-wrong." The boy's hands twisted together in a way that looked almost painful.

Toshinori held his breath.

"I ... I *don't know* ," the kid confessed. He darted a glance at Toshinori, then away again. Like he was afraid he'd be scolded. "L-like if it w-w-was life or death a-and someone offered, then. I. P-probably? But."

Midoriya-kun glanced at his mother. He smiled.

Toshinori hadn't seen someone so young smile so sadly in a long time.

"I… I *hope* I would say no. Because--" the kid took a deep breath. "I-I've had enough of being c-called *worthless.* A-and i-if the only way I can be, be a hero is b-by taking someone else's power… it would feel--" he gestured vaguely with his hands-- "I-I don't want to prove th-them right!"

Toshinori kept smiling. ("*The people in this world who can smile are always the strongest, Toshi-boy!"*) He was very practiced at keeping his smile, gentle and firm. Nana had taught him well, while she was his teacher.

Midoriya-kun's chin was trembling. His eyes, wide and watery, were unusually firm.

“I- I d-don’t know if I can be a hero. B-But… i-if I can *try*, m-maybe I can show that, that I’m not-- that people like me can be *worth something*.” Aizawa-san laid a hand on Midoriya-kun’s shoulder just as the first tear fell.

“‘People should never think that you have to be a very special person in order to help those who need you,’” the man murmured. Midoriya-kun nodded fervently.

Toshinori smiled. “Very well said, my boy. And--” he caught sight of Aizawa-san’s scowl as the man passed Midoriya-kun a tissue. “And I apologize for asking such a personal question.” He seemed to apologize a lot around this family.

“Thank you for coming,” Aizawa-san stated, in a tone that clearly relayed, *‘It’s time for you to leave now.’*

Toshinori stood and bowed to them all, but especially deeply to the boy he’d just promised to train. “Thank you for having me,” he replied. “Please… don’t hesitate to contact me about training.”

Midoriya-kun’s smile, wobbly and crooked under his tears, was nevertheless bright as the morning sun. Toshinori hoped, by coming to apologize, he’d at least managed to undo some of the damage his careless words had inflicted.

He hoped he’d still have the chance to help the boy on his path to becoming a hero, even if Midoriya-kun didn’t seem interested in becoming his successor.

Midoriya-san appeared somewhat in a daze as she led him to the

hallway and thanked him for visiting. He smiled at her, removed the too-small slippers and exited the apartment.

The sun was shining brightly, the breeze cool and bracing against his face as he headed back to his apartment. He stopped two shoplifters and removed one cat from a tree before he finally made his way to his apartment.

He kept up the smile until the door closed and locked behind him.

Chapter End Notes

> Uh. So. To everyone who asked whether Izuku is going to get OfA in this story, I finally have an answer? And the answer is no.
>
> Also I swear this chapter was not gonna be entirely made of angst but then I remembered Gran Torino trained Yagi and I was like "wait this is a way to make a parallel with Nana choosing Toshi" and my hand slipped. So. Sorry/not sorry about the angst, I SWEAR (for real this time) that we will return to our regularly scheduled fluff in the future! Thank you for reading :)

Questions

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Izuku was too quiet.

Not in, like, a timid way, or the way he sometimes got when he was tired and words just didn't come out as well as signs did.

Izuku was too quiet in the way that made Hitoshi think of, like, children hiding in the museum at Jurassic Park and peering around for velociraptors. The kind of quiet that made you hold your breath and listen for when the music changed.

Plus, he'd been scribbling in his journal non-stop for a week, which was always mildly unsettling behavior.

Hitoshi reached out a hand to steer Izuku away from the telephone pole he'd nearly walked into.

"You think you should maybe put that down while we're walking?" he asked, patting Izuku's shoulder. "Yamadad always says you can never have *too* many intact brain cells."

"Mm, just a minute," Izuku mumbled, adding a few more words to the page. Hitoshi pulled him to one side to let a biker pass. The street wasn't too busy, especially for a weekend, but there were a surprising amount of bikers for this time of morning.

"Izu, we could just go into a café if you want to sit down and write,"

he suggested. “I can text Kouji to wait.”

“N-no!” Izuku bit his lip and finally, reluctantly, closed his notebook. “I-it’s okay. We shouldn’t, um, make him wait.” He put his pencil in his pocket and crossed his arms, pressing the notebook against his front protectively.

Hitoshi sighed, but draped an arm over Izuku’s shoulders to continue pulling him along toward the bus stop. He’d noticed Izuku had a tendency to meander slightly while walking if he was distracted— not much, just enough to unconsciously bump into passersby. It was actually kind of hilarious that he never seemed to notice he wasn’t walking in a straight line, which was why Hitoshi had never bothered to point it out, but they were in somewhat of a hurry today.

The hurry being, mainly, puppies.

Six-week-old Shiba Inu puppies, currently being raised by Kouji’s father, which were going up for adoption in a week. Kouji had been sending them both photos and videos since the puppies were dropped off at the shelter connected to his dad’s veterinarian practice. At one point, all five of them had curled up together on his lap for a nap, and one of them had hiccupped in her sleep so loud she woke herself up. Kouji had been unable to move for a solid forty minutes, and he’d texted them a running commentary of the entire experience.

Hitoshi considered himself an avid cat person, but still. *Puppies.*

Izuku was gazing absently at the ground as they walked, thumb tapping against the cover of his notebook. “D-do you—” he cut himself off.

“Hmm?” Hitoshi glanced at him.

“Um. Do you think—” Izuku frowned. “Sh-should I learn a w-weapon?”

Hitoshi’s brain failed utterly to draw a connection between ‘six-week-old puppies’ and ‘weapons training.’ “...Huh?” Absently, he noted that they’d reached the bus stop and pulled Izuku to a halt.

“Um. F-for the future.” Izuku’s thumb tapped faster. “A-as a hero. Wouldn’t it be… better if I h-had a weapon?”

“....hm.” Times like this, he wished he could tell Izuku about Aizawa’s identity. Not just because he wanted Izuku to know (and he wanted at least a picture of his friend’s *face* when he finally figured it out), but because of what Aizawa had told him as a kid, when he asked a similar question. “It’s not a bad idea,” he hedged, “and we could probably ask Kawai-sensei for help, I know she has an eskrima class once a week.”

Izuku’s head lowered as he thought about it. “Th-that wouldn’t have helped, th-though,” he murmured.

“What, against the Sewage Dump?” Hitoshi scowled at the memory. “Yeah, maybe not. There wasn’t much that would have worked against him, though.”

“Electricity, Sonic Attack, Mind Control, Sleeping Gas… Lacquered Chains Pr-prison Sphere could have stopped him if Kamui Woods hadn’t, um, hadn’t had to deal with the f-fire.” Izuku’s hands clenched. “Any o-one of those qu-quirks could have beat h-him.”

So that’s what this was about.

Hitoshi bit his lip hard, thinking. “...okay. Yeah, they probably could have.”

Izuku’s shoulders hunched.

“ *If* they were there. *If* there wasn’t a hostage in the way. *If* they hadn’t been distracted controlling the fire. They could have beat him. But *you* figured out his weak points and got him to let the hostage go.” Hitoshi shrugged. “Besides, you could always electrocute him with a taser, or set off an alarm to mess with his ears, or, I dunno, toss a bottle of chloroform at him if you wanna pull an Aunt Nemu.”

Izuku’s eyes widened as he looked up.

“‘Quirks are like weapons, you can use them to hurt people or protect them,’” he quoted his dad, remembering being nine with Aizawa’s hand firm against his shoulder. Remembering he’d expected the hero to throw him into a jail cell, and tried to brainwash him into letting him run away. Remembering Aizawa had signed for his custody and brought him home, *given* him a home, anyway. “But who’s to say you have to use a quirk to save someone?”

His dads hadn’t, after all.

Hitoshi tapped Izuku’s shoulder as the bus arrived, digging his pass out of his pocket.

“C’mon, Kouji’s probably hogging all the puppies.” His phone ‘ding’ed with a received photo, as if on cue.

Izuku smiled, following him aboard and to a seat in the back. He set his backpack in his lap and put his notebook away, folding his hands in his lap. “Thanks,” he said, bumping Hitoshi’s side with his shoulder.

“Any time. Seriously. And…” Hitoshi gazed out the window, nonchalant. “You could ask Aizawa. About learning a weapon. He’d probably have recommendations.” Not that Yamadad *wouldn’t*, but Aizawa had gone through a few bo staff and sword courses before settling on his capture scarf as his weapon of choice.

Izuku nodded, thoughtful.

Hitoshi’s phone ‘ding’ed with another message, this one a video.

He and Izuku exchanged a grin and settled in to watch as the bus wended its way towards a veterinarian clinic and shelter with six-week-old Shiba Inu puppies.

Chapter End Notes

> I did a lot of research for this chapter and the next, and here it is: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=weLx9qoZ9VY
>
> I think it was mentioned in one of the Meanwhile Kouji chapters, but the boys were planning to go to the Kouda clinic to see puppies on the day they were attacked. It has now been a week since Izuku returned from the hospital and met with All Might, so they're heading to meet and socialize the puppies before they're old enough to be separated and adopted.

Plotting

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Yuwai, self-proclaimed “best bunny” for three years running, would throw a fit if he knew, but the truth was… caring for puppies was one of Kouji’s absolute favorite duties at his dad’s shelter. Sure, they were a pain to corral outside in the mornings. They pooped on everything, they fell asleep in tight piles that always made him worried one of the bottom layers would end up suffocating, and there was always one in every litter that learned how to climb the wall of their pen and escape, but.

He leaned toward the runt of the litter, Momo, who had placed her paws against his knee and was straining on stubby legs to gain enough height to crawl into his lap.

Her nose bumped gently against his. She squeaked a bark and pressed herself taller to lick at his cheek. **playplayplayplayplaycuddleplay!!**

Kouji felt one of her brothers take a bite of his sleeve and try to drag it, growling, behind him. He tripped on his own paw and decided to lay there for a few seconds until his other sister, Mulan, pranced over to shove her nose into his neck. **nap?nap?playplayplayplay** she commanded.

The brother (chubby but not roly-poly round, Kouji was pretty sure this one was Maru) whined but shuffled around so he could get to his feet and chase her back across the pen. **playplayrunplayrunplay!**

Their vocabulary wasn’t very advanced, but it served their needs.

From the doorway, a high-pitched squeak sounded that Kouji usually would have translated as **stopsquishingme** from anyone but a human.

Izuku had both hands pressed against his mouth as he stared at the romping puppies, eyes shining so bright it almost distracted from the deep shadows beneath them. Hitoshi wasted no time slinging his bag onto the floor and walking to the edge of the pen.

“They’re so fat and *tiiiiny* ,” he cooed. “Can I hold one?”

Kouji grinned, pointing at the clips holding the pen shut. *Don’t let them out* , he signed. Momo snapped at his hand in passing, tail wagging furiously. The best thing about Shiba Inu puppies was that their tails were usually so happy they laid straight up against their backs.

Izuku crept closer as Hitoshi began fumbling at the fastenings, opening them at last with a triumphant “Ha!”

Mushu, the fattest boy puppy, looked up from where he’d been stepping in the water dish and ran to investigate. His squeaky barks sounded the alarm, calling Mulan and Maru to his side.

Hitoshi quickly walked into the pen, beckoning Izuku in behind him. They managed to shut the gate just as Mushu began to pull on Hitoshi’s shoelace, untying it with a quick yank.

Kouji wondered if he could train them to tie people’s shoelaces together. They were a bit small to be effective guard dogs, but the perfect height for sabotage.

He waved his hands frantically when Izuku began to sit down on a

blue-edged pad. *Not there, not there!*, he warned, pointing to a ragged blanket by his side instead. Hitoshi scooped Mushu into his lap and hissed slightly as the puppy began to gnaw on his fingers.

“I thought they didn’t have teeth yet?” he complained. Kouji winced in sympathy. Puppy teeth were like needles.

“I-I think they grow teeth when th-they’re, um, four weeks old?” Izuku ventured. Momo, perking up at the sound of a new voice, mustered the energy to jump into Kouji’s lap and began squirming her way across it to investigate. Kouji placed his hand against the ground to soften her fall as she rolled off his leg head-first.

That’s right, he affirmed. Izuku grinned at him and at Momo, who bounced her way into his tennis shoe and started chewing the sole.

“Wh-what are their names?” he asked, hushed. Momo slumped into his hand slightly as he petted her carefully.

Kouji pointed them out one by one, spunky Momo (*she bites the hardest, be careful)* , lazy Maru, playful Mulan and the chunkster, Mushu. *He’s always the first one to eat,* Kouji explained, laughing as Hitoshi tried to pull his finger away from Mushu’s teeth. *But he still says he’s always hungry.*

Izuku perked up immediately, “Y-you can understand them already? Do they, um, talk different th-than adult dogs? H-how much do they understand, havetheylearnedtheirownnamesyet, wh-whatdotheycalleachotheranddodogshavefirstwordsbecausemyfirstwordwasuh ohand--”

Hitoshi started giggling. “I knew it! I called it, Kouji, you owe me a latte.”

Kouji scooped up Mulan as she barrelled past him and turned her around to run back to Hitoshi. *Here,* he gestured.

"... I will accept the substitution," Hitoshi amended, offering his fingers for Mulan to sniff. She growled when he tapped her nose, so he did it again.

"...what?" Izuku asked, looking between them.

He bet you'd ask a lot of questions in the first five minutes, Kouji explained. *I bet on the second five minutes.*

Izuku scrubbed a hand through his hair sheepishly. "Um… sorry?" he offered.

No 'sorry', questions are good. Kouji tossed a small red chew-toy as Momo began seriously attempting to draw blood from Izuku's hand. *Just talk slower.*

"O-oh. Um. Okay." Izuku held the chew toy still as Momo gripped it in her teeth and began to shake her head from side to side. "I guess-- My biggest qu-question is, um, do th-they have long-term memory? L-like, if you ask crows to follow someone, they will, c-cuz they know faces an-and keep track of people, but can dogs and cats do that too?"

Kouji pondered. Hitoshi fished out his phone to take a photo of Maru, who had toddled over to fall asleep with his chin propped up on the water bowl.

They have to be older, but they can remember at least a few weeks, he answered. *More if I ask more times. Why?*

Izuku twisted his hands together. “Oh. U-um. I was just, um, th-thinking? B-because at first I was wo-wondering if you could have, um, animals listening in o-on villain’s conversations? To report back? But, um, you s-said they only understand human talk wh-when you say it. But th-then I was online--”

“Was this the night you texted me at 4 am with just the word EUREKA?” Hitoshi asked. Kouji and Izuku both blinked at him. “Sorry, just curious.”

“Um. W-well, yes. But I, um, I found. Pinhole microphones? A-and if you could h-have cats or dogs o-or birds with hidden recorders an-and tell them where to go when you turn them on…” he trailed off uncertainly.

Kouji’s face split into a wide grin. *You think so too?*, he signed, ecstatic.

“Wait hold up, hold up a second--” Hitoshi tried to interject.

“Y-you could work wi-with undercover h-heroes to collect reports, a-a-and help scout out bases and things with cameras,” Izuku added, hands flapping. Momo jumped up to try and bite one.

Cameras would be better for birds, I think, but people don’t look very close at dog or cat collars. Microphones would be easy, Kouji added.

“Are you SERIOUSLY planning to set up a, a puppy-kitty spy network

while we are supposed to be *cuddling?* ” Hitoshi burst out, hugging a squirming Mushu to his chest. The puppy licked at his fingers.

Izuku and Kouji glanced at each other.

Yes.

“Y-yeah?”

Mulan took the opportunity to steal the toy Momo had dropped and prance off with it.

“Oh.” Hitoshi nodded. “Well, carry on then.”

Chapter End Notes

Izuku: You know you could just. Spy on everyone. For good!

Kouji: 'Bold of you to assume I haven’t already started.'

Hitoshi: this is cool and all but *holds up Mushu* Won’t Someone Think Of The Children?!

Izuku: oh.
Izuku: Yeah.
Izuku: Sorry.
Izuku: You’re right.

Izuku: So Kouji, how old do they have to be before they respond to training?

And I Will Sing A Lullaby

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

So how's school been? Kouji asked one-handed, while Mulan tried to yank a toy from his grasp. *Did you catch up on homework?*

"Oh. Uh, well. Y-yeah, but end-of-term tests are coming up..." Izuku answered, "and, um, I t-think we'll be okay? But K-- I mean. C-class has been. Distracting."

Kouji glanced up at Hitoshi's subtle head-shake and refrained from asking further. *At least break is coming up!,* he remarked, grinning at them both.

"Yeah, we gotta make ALL the plans! I wanna go to the beach. And the aquarium. And maybe an amusement park. Or karaoke? But--" Hitoshi's eyes widened briefly. "Oh, uh, sorry. Maybe not that last one, huh? I'm not good at singing anyway so--"

Izuku smiled apologetically at Kouji. "I-I don't si-sing much e-either! Um. But the aq- aquarium could be fun!"

Kouji smiled at them both, rescuing his hand from Mulan's grip. *Izu, you asked me if my quirk could work by singing once*.

"U-um." Izuku clearly wasn't sure how to respond. "S-sorry?"

It doesn't normally, but… Kouji took a deep breath. *Just. Listen for a bit.*

Hitoshi slid forward, settling Mushu in his lap as the puppy squirmed. Izuku shuffled closer to Kouji's side, turning wide eyes to watch his friend.

Kouji began to hum.

Quietly, at first, his voice barely leaving his closed lips. Kouji closed his eyes and hummed a slow, soft melody that began low and climbed slowly higher, looping back. Not a tune either of the other boys could call familiar, except that it was obviously a lullaby. When he reached the second verse, he breathed deeply and relaxed, humming louder.

Hitoshi's eyes widened as he listened. Even without hearing Kouji *sing* , he was amazed at how smooth and clear his voice was. It reminded him of watching honey pour out of a jar, glowing gold and warm.

He thought he could hear Izuku stifle a yawn next to him, but he was too busy watching as the puppies trundled their way in front of Kouji's folded legs to curl up together.

Kouji hummed the final note, opening his eyes with a shy smile. *Lullabies tend to work,* he explained.

Hitoshi "applauded" in sign, fingers waved enthusiastically at head-height. He would have clapped, but he didn't want to wake the puppies now that they'd settled. And…

Kouji startled as a warm weight slowly tipped against his shoulder. Soft green hair brushed against his face as he turned to look. *Wha- I-,* he turned back to Hitoshi, who was trying valiantly to suppress his snickers. *But he's not-- This has never happened before!*

Look, I'm pretty sure he isn't secretly a puppy, Hitoshi replied slowly. *...Mostly sure. But he hasn't been sleeping well and I DID make him take Benadryl before we got here.*

Oh. Kouji shifted slightly to let Izuku rest more securely against his side. *Let me know if he starts to slide, then.*

Hitoshi looked up from his phone. *Will do! Now hold still,* he ordered, aiming the camera.

Chapter End Notes

Kouji's song starts at 1:12 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aJmPQCwnZeU

The song is called Half Moon or Pan Tal (lyrics here: https://www.mamalisa.com/?p=974&t=es&c=140, backstory here: http://www.tonysweb.biz/blog/2015/05/09/spring-of-my-old-home-half-moon/). I vacillated on a couple of different Korean lullabies before choosing this one. SC!Kouji isn't fluent in Korean, but he learned a bit from his mom, including this lullaby.

chapter title comes from this song: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=puTvw1w0mrE but specifically the Stuck In The Middle version bc I've listened to that CD over and over

Meanwhile Katsuki

Chapter Notes

> brief tw for references to possible eating disorder, but nothing graphic

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bakugou household.

Masaru winced as he heard muffled explosions in the upstairs bathroom. Mitsuki paused at the table, but he laid a hand on her shoulder. “Let me. I’ll bring his lunch up.”

Plate of omurice in hand, he climbed to the second landing. Katsuki’s door was shut, papered heavily with “Keep Out!” and “This means you!” signs. Masaru knocked, gently turning the knob as he got no response.

“Katsuki?” he kept his voice low and mild.

“Go AWAY!”

He placed the plate on Katsuki’s desk, then turned to follow his son’s voice. “Katsuki, I won’t come in unless you want me to.”

From the shadow under the bathroom door, his son was standing over the sink. He could hear spitting over the running tap.

After half a minute or more, the water turned off. He moved back from the door to give Katsuki space.

His son looked wrecked. His perpetually fluffy hair was limp and sweaty, the whites of his eyes were shot with red, and he was scrubbing at his mouth with the back of his hand.

It had been two weeks since he'd been attacked, but he'd visibly lost weight. Masaru didn't think it was just because he'd been eating less at dinner.

"Katsuki," he murmured.

His son dropped his eyes and walked past him into his room.

He didn't slam the door behind him.

Masaru took a deep breath and followed him in. He watched Katsuki's face screw up as he saw the plate and the way he tried to hide it by flinging himself face-first onto the bed. The messy sheets were half-trailing on the floor.

"Son."

"What." Katsuki's voice was raspy and raw. And tired. He wasn't sure he'd ever heard his explosive, energetic boy so tired before.

Masaru took a seat at the edge of his bed, resting a gentle hand on Katsuki's tense shoulder. "Please don't take this the wrong way."

A low growl.

“You haven’t been sleeping. Or eating well. You could be coming down with something, but…” he braced himself. “If it’s something… different. Something more than that. Or even, just because it might make you feel better. Would you consider… going to talk to someone?”

Silence. Heavy as it was unusual.

"I know... you didn't want to, when you were a kid." The shoulder under his hands shrunk away. "And it was your choice not to. I stand by that. It's still your choice."

"Like fuck it is," he heard from the pillow. He let the language slide.

He pulled in a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Your mom probably didn't tell you... because I asked her not to. I didn't want you to think... Well. I know what people tend to think." Katsuki's head turned reluctantly, so that one dull red eye peered up at him. "Katsuki, I've been to therapy multiple times." The eye widened.

"I can tell you about why I went, and for how long. But I just want you to know... I don't think I'd be here today, as happy as I am, if I hadn't. And if you decide it's something that might help you, I'll be here every step of the way."

He squeezed his son's shoulder gently. "And if there's anything you'd like to talk about. I know I'm not... always here. Or very good at talking. But I will make time to listen."

Katsuki blinked, heavily, then screwed his eyes shut, turning to bury his face in his pillow. Tremors in his shoulders reached Masaru's hand.

He sighed again, deeper. "I know maybe it doesn't feel like it. But it's going to be okay. You're going to be okay."

Masaru sat on the edge of the unmade bed, rubbing his son's trembling shoulders as a plate of omurice grew cold on the desk. And not another word was said.

Chapter End Notes

I know this chapter is tonally WAY DIFFERENT from last one but I did feel I had to show what was going on to the other victim the day Izuku met the slime monster, and this gave me a chance to start getting Katsuki on the road to recovery. I am not going to write him as someone with an eating disorder, but nightmares/ nausea are a part of how he's experiencing trauma.

Lily white and poppy red

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Shouto remembered having long hair.

He must have been about eight, because that's when Fuyumi started her selfie phase and he knew she kept a photo of the three of them, her, Natsuo and Shouto curled up on the couch with snowman pins in their hair, as her phone background. His hair had come past his shoulder, flour-white and blood-red and Fuyumi had loved french-braiding it on nights when their father didn't come home. She always said it looked exactly like a peppermint stick and should they try dipping it in hot cocoa to see if it would melt, Shouto? And Natsuo actually did one time, when he gestured too close to Shouto's shoulder with a full mug, but he'd apologized before Shouto could get angry about it.

Mother used to cut their hair all together, lining them up one by one on a chair over newspaper, cool fingers lifting up their bangs and tickling the fallen hairs from their shoulders. If Father wasn't home, she would play one of her CDs and she and Natsuo and Fuyumi would sing slow and sweet, and Touya would groan about girly music and tap his feet anyway.

They all had long hair when Shouto was eight.

His father had come home early one lazy-on-the-couch night. He hadn't said a single word about their hot cocoa mugs and candy-swirl braids.

A few days later, he'd demonstrated to Shouto how long hair could be used as a hand-hold by a villain in a fight. It was another of his "if you use your fire" tactics. If you use your fire, you can wear it as a halo, as a mane, as a crown, you can lace it through your hair to burn and singe and warn. If you use your fire, no one can get close enough to hurt you.

Logically, this was entirely inaccurate. If Shouto used fire, only the fire-proof could get close enough to hurt him. He said nothing and got back up when he was told.

Fuyumi had cut the singed and smoke-damaged sections of his hair that night, though the burnt smell lingered until the next day. Her cool fingers lifted his bangs away from his eyes (he'd been shivering, he didn't notice until later, shivering away from cold fingers and gray eyes and sharp scissors and *his eye*--) and she'd bit her lip when he'd asked if it could still cover his forehead, if she thought Father would object when it got in his eyes (*his eye*).

Shouto regarded the letter on his desk from beneath his fringe. He wasn't sure what had made him think of it-- his hair had been short for years. If he ever missed the weight of his braid against his shoulders and the cups of cocoa they didn't keep in the house anymore, it didn't make any difference.

It was a weekend. He was supposed to be running the neighborhood, since the weather was nice enough that he wouldn't need the treadmill. He was supposed to be 'conditioning.' He was sitting at his desk reading his mother's letter for the fifth time.

Nothing in those two pages had mentioned his hair, or their hot cocoa, although she had talked about the soft rabbit toy she'd given him as a newborn, the first toy he'd ever had. He wasn't sure what had happened to it, wasn't sure he wanted to know. It had been gone when he came home from the hospital, and so had she.

Everything you were born with, everything you inherited from us, from the color of your hair to your quirk-- it is yours now.

Shouto had read that sentence over and over. Maybe that was why he'd thought about long hair. He'd thought for years it was a mark of what he was-- half of his mother forced to mesh with half of his father, unbalanced and ugly. He'd thought she hated that half of him, the half of him that wasn't hers.

It came to mind now, though, his sister's fingers braiding his hair together and how she'd laughed to see its peppermint swirl.

It is yours now.

He folded the letter and put it in his desk drawer, filed in with his past English tests. Father never asked to see them, since Shouto always got a perfect score.

Shouto stood up, for a moment feeling hyper-aware of the way his bangs rested against his forehead, the cloud-white and poppy-red of his hair against his scar.

Everything you were born with, everything you inherited from us--

The words pounded against the pavement as he ran, echoed in his ears with his heartbeat.

It is yours now.

Chapter End Notes

idk if this is angst or not, it kind of just... happened. Shouto's reaction to reading his mom's letter, and what it means to try and see yourself as a whole person, as your own person.

also I've been listening to Hadestown a lot and Eurydice's song was stuck in my head on the drive home (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zTKB4xRF7RY). Ergo the chapter title.

also i do not ask for fanart but if anyone DOES end up drawing peppermint-french-braid shouto and sibs, pls shoot me a link!

syke I ended up drawing it (badly) myself bc I HAD TO: https://thoughtsthroughfog.tumblr.com/post/189725609486/sc-shoutos-french-braid-i-am-so-not-an-artist

A VERY KIND PERSON DREW ME ANOTHER FRENCHBRAID SHOUTO and here is the link, thank you constellationd!: https://thoughtsthroughfog.tumblr.com/post/618474387445825536/hi-its-351am-as-i-type-this-out-and-i

Just Two Guys Chillin' In The Nurse's Office (Five Feet Apart Cuz They're Trying Not To Kill Each Other)

Some days, Hitoshi reflected, were just not worth the effort of wriggling out from under a blanket's worth of warm cats.

Most days, if he's honest, but this day in particular had been a shit sandwich with a garnish of crap on the side. It wasn't really just one thing, though, not one single thing he could point to and say "this is the shitty bit, please remove it from my day sandwich." It was a lot of little bits of shit all smeared on the bread and--

He may have gone a bit too far with this metaphor, he reflected, setting down his sandwich.

"A-are you feeling okay?" Izuku asked, eyes wide and concerned.

Hitoshi shrugged. *Just don't feel like talking,* he signed.

"O-oh." At the unsure look taking over his friend's face, Hitoshi hated himself just a skosh more.

Tell me something about heroes? He asked instead. And as Izuku nodded and began to speak, stumbling over facts and theories like a foal bumbling in the woods, he fixed his eyes back on the table and reflected.

It wasn't just one thing, not like the days he could blink his eyes open, gritty and sleepless, and what parts of him didn't hurt were cold and numb and aching, seven years old again and starved for warmth.

It wasn't a nightmare, it wasn't the insomnia, well, it *mostly* wasn't the insomnia… Yama-dad had offered to let him stay home today when he saw just how much sugar Hitoshi had stirred into his coffee that morning, but summer break was a week away and he had a math test today, so. It wasn't even the math test, mostly, like, sure, it wouldn't be *fun* but he had studied and everything.

A piece of yakisoba flew from Izuku's hands at a particularly excited gesture and Hitoshi handed him a napkin, setting down his own yakisoba pan once and for all. Not that it wasn't good, it was just.

Yeah. He wasn't really hungry. Or feeling good enough to feel hungry. Whichever.

"--and we're still planning the Sports Festival re-watch after finals, r-right?" Izuku's eyes were wide and plaintive. "B-Because I've never

really watched the first-year competitions butit'sactuallyaprettygoodwaytoanalyzewhatkindsofquirksareusefulfortheentsansayhepresentedlastyears'--"

The entrance exam. The topic Izuku had been fixated on all week, understandably. Hitoshi grimaced as subtly as possible, pressing a hand against the ache beginning in his temples.

Yeah, we're still on, he responded, attempting a smile. It wasn't a terrible idea, was the thing. It was actually really smart of Izuku to try and extrapolate the requirements of the entrance exam from the quirks and skillsets of the most recent teens to pass it. Hitoshi was certain that Izuku would guess at least part of the test as soon as he started checking the ratio of physical strength and electric interference quirks in each passing class. Hitoshi had never made the connection for himself, but, well... he'd never had to, had he?

Izuku had his notebook out now, scribbling a few lines under his most recent entry while he absentmindedly nibbled at the sandwich in his other hand. Hitoshi pretended to be full, wrapping the remains of his sandwich in plastic to throw out at the end of lunch period. Secrets he wasn't allowed to share sat heavy on his tongue.

Hitoshi really, really wished he could just… come out and tell him. The parts he was *allowed* to tell, anyway, the ones that weren't covered by the… extremely extensive NDAs he'd been made to sign when he was officially adopted, and again when his parents started bringing him to work. NDAs, in this case, enforced by a government worker with a Promise-Keeper quirk Izuku would kill to learn about except that that was ALSO classified information.

He glanced at his friend, his *first real friend,* the first person his age he could remember ever daring to speak freely and laugh at his jokes and bump shoulders together as they walked the halls, and. And even though he knew Izuku would forgive him, would probably understand the things he wasn't allowed to say, even if he knew his friend probably wouldn't even get mad--

(Because did he ever? Even when he should?)

Even. Even if he knew Izuku wouldn't hate him for this. Probably.

How was he supposed to tell his friend, who was studying madly, training incessantly to pass an entrance exam skewed to quirks and skills he'd never had, designed to stretch limits he'd have to near-kill himself to reach--

Hitoshi glanced at Izuku, whose eyes were again regarding him with quiet concern.

How the fuck was he supposed to tell him that Hitoshi had been on the list of recommended students since he turned ten?

“Look, I’m not *weak* , just give me a note and let me head back to class!” Katsuki growled at the nurse, trying to ignore the sparks growing and dying in his vision.

“Katsuki, your teacher told me you fainted in gym class,” the woman began, placating. *Condescending*.

“He’s a fucking liar,” Katsuki interrupted, folding his arms. Ignoring the way they were cold and almost trembling. So the fuck what if he was cold, the air conditioner was always too fucking cold this time of year.

“He suggested you have a lie-down for the rest of the period, and I agree-- you’re looking a bit peaky.” The lady actually reached forward to press her hand against Katsuki’s forehead. Katsuki smacked her hand away.

“Just. Give me. A note,” he ordered through gritted teeth. He wasn’t fucking weak, goddammit! Dad had said the, the thing with food might go away as soon as he finished the course of antibiotics, anyway. He was *fine*.

“I can call your parents if you like,” the nurse offered, like an unhelpful ass set on ignoring his every word.

“DON’T call my-- fuck. Fuck it! Fine, I’ll go down for a fucking *nap*,” he spat, striding forward to the beds at the end of the room.

“Good! There’s another boy feeling off, just let him rest,” Nurse Unhelpful dictated, settling back at her desk. Was she playing fucking online solitaire?

Katsuki rolled his eyes and threw himself down on the bed, scowling as he almost immediately began to feel less lightheaded. Maybe he just needed to drink more water, that’s what normally helped with the fucking floaty feeling.

“Can you die or whatever a little quieter?” a sleep-raspy voice asked from the next bed. He opened his mouth to answer but killed his voice once he got a look.

It was the fucking Purple Troll Doll fucker lying on the next bed, with a wet handkerchief over his eyes.

Katsuki flipped him the bird, even though he knew the fuck wouldn't see it. It was the principle of the thing. "None of your fucking business," he answered.

Purple Troll stiffened slightly and raised a hand to shift the wet handkerchief just enough to peer at Katsuki through a pain-slitted eye. "... Great. Just what I needed. A migraine and *you*," the other boy snarked.

Katsuki scowled. "Not my idea of fun either, asshole!"

Purple Troll winced slightly at the noise and turned his face away. He didn't try to order Katsuki to be quieter, though. Maybe he'd wised up a bit.

"Look. I really, *really* don't like you, but I am in…" Purple Troll snorted mirthlessly, "enough pain that if I could cut my own head off I probably *would*. So, just for the next period or whatever, how about *I* don't talk to you and *you* don't talk to me. At all. Okay?"

Katsuki rolled his eyes but turned on his side, away from the fucker and his headache hankie. "Whatever," he muttered, burying his face in his arms. Not like he wanted to talk with the other boy anyway.

Purple Troll sighed, long and deep like a death rattle. Katsuki shut his eyes and curled up, waiting for the nurse to come back and let him go back to class like someone who hadn't fainted in the middle of gym class for Deku and every other fucking extra to see. He didn't want to think about all the irritating questions he'd have to face when he got back to class, everyone and their fucking cat trying to see if he was sick or just trying to get out of the math review.

Deku would know he hadn't been faking, which was almost worse.

Purple Troll sighed again as Katsuki rolled over.

"Can you stop that?" he asked, monotone.

"I'm trying to get fucking comfortable," Katsuki shot back, low-voiced. Just for that, he rolled over again, with a dramatic rustle of blankets.

Purple Troll sighed *again*.

Katsuki buried his head in the pillow, considering whether it would be worth it to try and smother himself.

This. Was going to be a long fucking nap period.

Not What Dying Looks Like

Chapter Notes

> Warning for description of migraines in the first paragraph or so, along w/ very brief mention of vomiting.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hitoshi wasn't sure how old he was when he got his first migraine, but he knew exactly what he'd eaten right before it struck.

There was a boy in the group home with blue hair who would talk with him.

Or, to put it another way, the only boy in the group home who would talk to him had blue hair.

Light blue like silver when it hits the shadows, like what he thought Russian blue cats must look like. The boy with blue hair noticed he didn't get up with the rest that morning and brought him a bowl of rice with a sprinkle of wasabi furikake.

It took Hitoshi ten minutes to cough it back up in the sink when the pain took hold.

Here's the thing: when you're young enough and in enough pain and no one can tell you why, the question you want answered more than anything is, "Am I dying?"

In the same way infants cry before they understand what "hungry" is, a child curled up on a bed, fists clenched against their eyes as they cry because it hurts and because crying makes it hurt worse but it still *hurts* so they're crying *harder*, is thrumming with the anguished

question, “Am I dying?”

Here’s the thing: when Hitoshi screamed and whined and moaned and finally whispered, “it hurts it hurts so bad I think I’m dying I’m dying am I dying,” the boy with blue silver hair rested the back of his hand against Hitoshi’s forehead for a moment and murmured, “That isn’t what dying looks like.”

Hitoshi didn’t know what a migraine was until he was ten years old and Yamada pulled down all the blinds and took him out for lunch and dinner so Aizawa could lie in a dark room in silence for the day.

Yamada and Aizawa didn’t know he had migraines until they found him one morning lying on the bathroom tiles pressing his forehead into the cold and shivering miserably. He’d bitten his lip bloody trying not to call for help.

These days he can feel them coming a few hours early sometimes, with the way light starts to catch and smear at the edge of his vision. These days, he can place a wet towel over his eyes, put in one earbud of classical music on the lowest sound setting, and ride out the waves of agony. (These days, he can take a pill once the pain first strikes, a pill he FORGOT AT HOME like an absolute idiot.)

These days, he still finds himself muttering “this isn’t what dying looks like” when he feels he’s about to be battered to pieces, crashed apart by the tide.

Here’s the final thing: Hitoshi was the only one in the group home who could come close to the blue-haired boy. Or, to put it another way, he was the only kid in the group home the boy would come close enough to touch.

The other bed kept rustling at the edge of his hearing. The handkerchief across his eyes had long gone cold, but not cold enough that it dimmed the heat radiating from his left temple, right beside his ear. Hitoshi breathed slow and deep, in, hold, out, in, hold, and out, the way Aizawa taught him.

Pain gets worse if you tense up in fear that it's coming.

In, hold, out.

This isn't what dying looks like.

In, hold--

Rustle.

Hitoshi sighed.

The neighboring bed sighed *louder* and with exaggerated aggravation.

"...You could just go back to class," Hitoshi made the mistake of muttering.

"I could! I could go back to class! That would be a *smart* thing for a nurse to let me do instead of fucking nap time for lame-asses over here! But noooo, instead I get to be stuck"-- a sound like the thump of

a foot against a mattress-- “here--” thump-- “with Breathes-Loud McAss-Face!” THUMP.

Hitoshi flinched at the last kick to the mattress, wrinkling his nose as the washcloth began to slip to the side. He righted it and pressed a hand to his forehead, careful not to touch the spot where pain drilled directly into his brain.

“Is there a nice way to request you just, be, quiet?” He wondered.

The rustling of the bed sounded vaguely offended this time.

“Don’t you fucking dare use your quirk,” the other boy snarled. Hitoshi rolled his eyes under the washcloth and immediately regretted it.

“... hey.” Hitoshi chewed his lip for a moment. “When you got your quirk.”

“What.” Bakugou sounded impatient.

“When you got a quirk and Izu didn’t. How did he… react?” Hitoshi asked. *Was he jealous when you got everything he ever wanted without even trying,* he didn’t say. *Was he disappointed and alone, was he angry, was he unhappy and envious. Was that why you stopped being friends,* he didn’t ask.

“... the nerd was fucking ecstatic.” Bakugou’s voice was raspy, like he was trying to growl but couldn’t quite manage. “Cried a ton, asked me to demonstrate, followed me around muttering all the different ways it could— before the doctor, he— look, he was a fucking nuisance,

okay?”

The bed rustled pointedly.

Without looking, Hitoshi could tell Bakugou had turned his back. Conversation over.

Somehow, though, Hitoshi had expected that. It was…. extremely Izuku-ish, now that he thought about it.

His friend was exactly the kind of person who’d see someone else living his most cherished dream and be sincerely, overwhelmingly happy for them.

Hitoshi breathed slow and deep, cool washcloth pressed against the pounding ache at his temple. Despite the pain, the terrible math test he’d only managed to complete half of, the bitingly cold school infirmary air and the loud rustling of the bed next to him, despite everything, he smiled.

Chapter End Notes

> About to go to the internet-less wastes for a week, so I’m trying to update all my WIPs before I go. It’s not exactly a happy update (sorry!) but next chapter will be, I promise!!
>
> Anyway, Merry Christmas/ Hanukkah Sameach/ Happy Yule / Happy almost Kwanzaa!! I wish you all good times with friends and family, and good luck in the new year ^_^

We Lean To Turn in the Postdrome

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Izuku fiddled with his phone as he leaned against the Aldera Junior High gates, chewing on his lip. He and Hitoshi weren't really planning to walk home together, in the way that they didn't really tend to plan *anything* after school. Just, they usually did. Meet up at the gates and walk home, or walk Hitoshi to his station before Izuku walked home. And Hitoshi would text if he was going to be late or if one of his dads was planning to pick them up.

And he hadn't texted.

But he wasn't *here* either.

Maybe… he was angry? At lunch he'd been quiet, and kind of frowning, and he'd *told* Izuku it was okay and listened to him prattle on and on, but, maybe he'd been annoyed?

Except that even if he was annoyed he wouldn't just disappear without a word.

And there was only one exit from the campus, unless he'd decided to hop the fence in the back.

Izuku's phone flew from his nervous hands, rolling to a stop next to a familiar pair of sneakers.

Izuku gulped.

“Hey nerd.” Kaccha-- Bakugou bent to pick up his phone. Holding it in hands that had exploded his homework, his lunches, his jacket--

“Catch.”

Izuku flailed in surprise as his phone was launched toward his face. Sort of launched at his face. Launched softly.

Had Kacchan actually just… tossed him his phone?

“If you’re waiting for your *boyfriend*, he’s still in the nurse’s office.” Ka-- *Bakugou* growled, glaring at him.

“H-He’s not my--” Izuku stopped, eyes widening. “Um. Th-thank… you?”

With a terse nod, Kacchan grimaced and turned away.

Izuku wanted to stand there in a daze (Had Kacchan actually just… come over here to tell him that? In a, well, sort of, *nice way?* And he hadn’t tried to blow up his phone or even threaten it a little?) but he was running back into the school before he knew it.

Was Hitoshi hurt? Or did he catch a bad cold or the flu or, or mono or something? He knew Hicchan only missed school if he had a fever, so for him to be in the nurse’s office but not call Izuku to let him know… was he unconscious?

Izuku panted as he reached the third floor, pressing a hand to his side as he tried to slow his breathing down. He didn't want to run into the office huffing and puffing and unable to get words out.

Gulping on his dry throat, Izuku knocked on the nurse's open door and peeked around. Hitoshi wasn't in any of the chairs, so he had to be…

Something in Izuku's chest loosened as he caught sight of a puff of purple hair peeking out of the blankets in one of the beds in the rest area. He sighed, hands clenching on his backpack straps.

"Do you need something?" Nurse Itami asked, flicking her gaze up from her computer screen and back again.

"U-um. Hi-Hitoshi and I go home together," he murmured. If Hitoshi was asleep, he didn't want to wake him just yet.

"You can take him," the nurse said indifferently. "His migraine faded an hour ago, he's just been sleeping it off."

"O-oh." Izuku frowned, processing. "He- um, his parents, did you--?"

"He told me not to call them. Said he'd be fine going home." The nurse turned away, apparently done with the conversation.

"Um. Th-thank you for looking after him." Izuku ducked his head in an awkward nod and shuffled past her to approach Hitoshi's bed.

“Hitoshi,” he whispered, gently tapping the mattress next to his friend’s shoulder. “I-If you’re awake, we need to go home.”

“Mnnnrgh,” Hitoshi disagreed, turning his head to the side. A damp washcloth fell off his forehead with a muted plop.

“Hicchan,” Izuku whispered, tapping slightly harder. “I can call your dads, but we need to go.”

Hitoshi let out what could only be termed a disagreeing whine as he rolled over, turning his back to Izuku to curl up under the covers.

Izuku looked down at the condensed ball of friend on the bed. He was fairly sure he could pick Hitoshi up now (aikido and weekend weight training had been good to his muscles) but not so sure he could manage walking them both down the stairs.

“Hicchan, do you want me to call--” he began, sitting on the edge of the bed.

“.....nno.” Hitoshi’s voice was sleep-ruffled. He finally yawned, stretching back like a cat showing his belly.

Izuku shifted slightly to avoid being whacked by his arms. “Why, um, why not?” he asked.

“Mmmm….” Hitoshi’s eyes hadn’t opened once. “Teacher’s… meeting?” He didn’t sound too sure.

“Oh.” Izuku had heard Aizawa complaining about his students recently. He seemed pretty dissatisfied with his job, to say the least.

“S’they’ll be home…” Hitoshi yawned again, belatedly putting his hand up to cover his mouth, “...late.”

Izuku looked at his phone, at the nurse, back at his phone, then at his friend.

“Okay.”

He put his phone in his backpack, then bent to the side of the bed to pick up Hitoshi’s. He slipped his arms through the straps and settled the bag in front of him, like a kangaroo pouch.

He sat on the bed and tried to figure out the best way to do this. Shoulders? Arms? Feet first?

Lining up Hitoshi’s indoor slippers next to the bed, he nudged Hitoshi’s shoulder until his friend curled up, then rolled him over the other way to face the shoes. He lifted him from the shoulders until he was sitting upright, then tapped Hitoshi’s knees.

“Shoes. Just slide your feet down.”

Hitoshi obeyed lethargically, eyes slipping briefly open. “Mh?”

“Come on.” Izuku supported him to stand, watching worriedly as he rolled forward and back on his feet like a sailor standing on land. He

slid himself under Hitoshi's arm to give him something to lean on. He didn't even want to think about Hitoshi trying to ride the subway like this, especially since his eyes were firmly shut again. What if he missed a step and fell on the tracks? Or lost his Pasmo card, or missed his stop and ended up stranded?

There was really only one thing to do.

"You're coming home with me," he promised, turning to lead them out of the office.

Chapter End Notes

(title taken from Dessa's "Velodrome" bc I love her https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6c8KyRcT020)

Postdrome: "Postdrome also called the "migraine hangover," comes after the pain of a migraine attack has subsided. Symptoms can last hours or even several days. While not everyone with migraine suffers from postdrome, those who do report it can be as debilitating as the migraine pain itself. Common postdrome symptoms include fatigue, nausea, sensitivity to light, dizziness, body aches and difficulty concentrating."--americanmigrainefoundation.org

All Lines Are Curved in the Postdrome

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hitoshi had a dream once where all his joints were… *wrong*. Like a doll who'd been taken apart and put back together backwards, but with three extra knees. He'd slipped and stumbled and slalomed trying to walk a straight line.

It hadn't been a nightmare, there was nothing inherently scary about it, but it was one of those dreams where you wake up and take a deep breath and pet the purring cat on your chest and stare at the ceiling until you settle back into your own body.

Walking his aching body home with Izuku was like that dream, but dialed up to eleven.

It was probably funny, he thought. Izu was short enough that Hitoshi regularly rested an elbow on his hair floof when he felt like it. Staggering semi-blindly with his arm over his friend's stocky shoulders felt like he was bent over nearly in half. His head swam.

It probably looked hilarious. Hitoshi was vaguely, distantly grateful that Izuku wasn't laughing.

"--
sensitivitytolightanddizziness,bodyachesandnausea,wasthereanythingelse?
Ishouldhaveprinteditoutinsteadofjustgoogling…"

Mumbling, sure. But not laughing.

Hitoshi muzzily butted his head against Izuku's. To hush him. Definitely not because he was tired and just felt like it. "'Sokay," he assured. "Jus' needta… lie down."

"U-um okay, but… *here?"* Izuku gestured with the hand holding Hitoshi's arm. Presumably at the street. Hitoshi didn't feel like peeling his eyelids back up to check.

"Nah. Couch. Just… soon?"

"Home's a minute away," Izuku promised, shifting him to stand further upright. Hitoshi grimaced as his inner ears protested the move.

By the time he felt good enough to open his eyes again, a slight crack to see if all light was still a piercing blind-y tool of the devil, they were standing in front of a staircase.

"C-can you make it up?" Izuku asked.

Hitoshi tilted his head to the side, considering. His vision filled with fun black and green sparkles.

"Nooooooooope," he answered.

"Okay. O-okay." Izuku took a deep breath. Backing up slightly, he shuffled until Hitoshi was leaning back against the wall. Then he took a look around, dropped both of their backpacks and kicked them to the darker part of the stairwell.

Hitoshi blinked and Izuku had him in a piggy-back as he climbed the stairs. The toes of his shoes brushed the upper steps whenever Izuku paused to lean forward and keep him from sliding.

If his eyes heated up and started to prickle, it was definitely just the migraine. Light sensitivity. Makes your eyes water like crazy. Hitoshi slumped forward as they came to a stop and ducked his head down.

Just to block the light.

Definitely not because he was tired and dizzy and achy and his mouth was sleep-stale and dry and his parents were at work and he wanted to be asleep on the couch with a soft blanket, and a boatload of Tylenol, and a documentary playing, and his dad's soft snoring, and the purring of no less than three contented cats.

Izuku leaned forward as he carried Hitoshi across the hall, doing something complicated with his arms so he could keep his friend on his back while fishing in the front of his shirt to grab his house key.

If he noticed the way Hitoshi's shoulders had begun to tremble, he said nothing.

With a quiet click, the door opened, and a rush of cool air wisped past Hitoshi's wet cheeks. He stuck his head down against Izuku's solid shoulder and breathed.

"I'm gonna set you down on the couch and, and go grab our bags, okay?"

Izuku's voice was soft. His hands were gentle as he carried Hitoshi to

the couch and crouched to let him down.

“I-I’ll be back in a minute.”

Hitoshi nodded slowly, wincing as the dull clench of his neck muscles protested. He slumped back into the cushions as Izuku’s footsteps shuffled quietly away.

The apartment door closed and everything was quiet, dim, and cool.

Hitoshi pulled his knees up to his chest, curling forward in as tight a ball as he could. Ah, fuck, his shoes. Blindly, fumbling, he managed to undo the laces and kick them off, shuffling backwards so he could brace against the back of the couch and dig his socks into the cushions.

It wasn’t smart to curl up after a migraine. The ache in his neck and shoulders protested, and sympathetic waves of pain tingled down his arms. It wasn’t smart to do anything after a migraine but drink tea and lay down in the dark with heating pads and blankets and wait for the world and your mind to smudge slowly back into focus.

Hitoshi sat in the silence and curled up tighter.

Izuku *had* this. He’d gotten Hitoshi home, he’d managed to carry both their backpacks up the stairs even though they felt like they were full of sharp-edged bricks, he’d turned on the water heater so he could make tea, and Mom’s bean-stuffed neck pillow was heating up in the microwave. Heat, dark, caffeine, no food in case Hitoshi got

nauseous… or maybe just a little food? He could heat up some miso soup probably, or make eggs to go with rice...

He bit his lip, stealing a glance at his friend curled up on the couch. He hadn't moved since Izuku came back inside. At all.

Slowly, careful of his steps to keep the noise down since Hitoshi had flinched every time they passed a honking car or a barking dog on their way home, Izuku tiptoed into his room to grab his quilt.

Just as he reached the door, he turned back around and snatched the plushy that lived next to his pillow.

Hitoshi had changed positions, he saw once he came back. Or, well, he'd rolled down so he was curled into a ball on his side now.

The corners of his eyes were tightly shut. And wet.

Izuku exhaled a slow sigh. "Hi-Hicchan?" he whispered.

"...Mmh?"

"Do you… want a blanket?" Izuku tiptoed closer.

"Mmhmm." Hitoshi's hunched shoulders loosened slightly. He probably needed a pillow too, for his neck.

Izuku draped the quilt carefully over his friend's shoulders. Then,

quietly daring, he lifted Hitoshi's arm slightly to tuck the plushy under it.

"...I-It's All Might," he murmured, when Hitoshi seemed to pause slightly. "He's. He's good to hug when, um, when you're feeling bad." Izuku's first All Might plushy had been "lost" at school when he was five, before he stopped bringing toys to class for sharing time. This plushy had seen him through some rough years. It had even ripped at the seams once. Mom had added in a little packet of dried lavender when she sewed him back together.

Lavender was supposed to help headaches, right?

Hitoshi managed a smile at that. "Thanks, Izu."

Just when Izuku was about to respond, the microwave beeped. "Oh! The pillow! J-just a second, Hicchan."

The pillow was slightly heavy, but warm against his hands, like a park bench in afternoon sun. He carried it back to the couch, placing it in Hitoshi's hands. "It's for your neck. Mom, um, it al-always helps her headaches, so, um."

Hitoshi turned on his side so he could drop the pillow onto the back of his neck. He hissed slightly at the weight and the warmth.

"I-Is it too hot? I also, um, the tea will be ready soon, if caffeine would help? Or I can make something to eat, since you didn't eat much at lunch, and. Um. Is there anything else I can do to help?" Izuku wrung his hands. Hitoshi was frowning, but it didn't look like he was in pain. Well, *more* pain, at least.

“…Tea would be nice. And.” Hitoshi cracked open an eye, meeting Izuku’s worried gaze. He looked hesitant for some reason. “I’m probably gonna sleep soon but. Could you just…” he waved a hand vaguely, frustrated. “Maybe just… sit here and… maybe turn on a documentary?”

Izuku gave him a wobbly smile, relief and worry colliding in his throat. “A-anything you need, Hicchan,” he promised, utterly sincere.

Chapter End Notes

> To be honest, the only thing that came to mind when I was writing this was like “wait but how would Izuku get post-migraine-loopy Shinsou up the stairs to his apartment." Then my nerd brain just flashed like, Samwise Gamgee, teary-eyed on the slopes of Mount Doom as the music swells, going “Come on, Mr. Frodo! I can’t carry it for you…. But I can carry you!”
>
> Hitoshi gets a piggyback up the stairs from a devoted, determined hobbit basically is what I’m saying, that’s it that’s the chapter.

Meanwhile Shouta

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Green Kid:

Aizawa-san, Yamada-san

I'm really sorry to bother you at work, but Hitoshi had a migraine at school?

I got him home and he's doing better but I thought you should know

*to my house, sorry

Aizawa:

Thanks for letting us know, kid. I'll be there in 20 minutes.

Loud1:

Thank you for taking care of him, Izuku!

Can you do me a favor and ask him if he's taken any of his meds?

And what his pain level is?

Green Kid:

He said he took Tylenol in the nurse's office.

And his pain level is "a four right now but spiked up to a six earlier."

But he did sleep at the nurse's and felt better.

Loud1:

That's good! If you could heat up a wet towel for him, that usually helps with muscle aches.

And Nemuri's coming over for dinner tonight if he needs help sleeping.

Green Kid:

Okay, thank you! I'll let him know, he's kind of half asleep right now.

We're watching a documentary about otters.

He didn't eat much today but he drank some tea.

Sorry, I didn't really know what to do, so I just brought him here.

Aizawa:

You did good, kid.

Just remember next time you can call us from school.

I'm here.

Green Kid:

Okay, it's unlocked!

If Shouta had any questions on why Izuku didn't get up to let him in as he usually did, they were answered once he changed into guest slippers and made his way to the family room.

"W-welcome-- I mean, hi," Izuku whispered. He waved somewhat sheepishly from his seat on the couch. In the dark room, the TV screen cast blue shadows across his face and shoulders.

Shouta looked at the purple tuft of hair that was all he could see of his kid, the rest covered in a *truly* atrociously loud All-Might patterned quilt.

“He fell asleep on you, huh,” he murmured, walking forward.

Izuku huffed a quiet laugh. “U-um. Yeah. Bu-but he looked like he needed it.”

Shouta sighed. “How long’s he been out?”

“Um.” Izuku squinted past the television (they were halfway through a program about otters, from what Shouta could tell) to read the clock. “About… half an hour?”

“Okay, are you good there or do you want to switch?”

Silence.

Izuku stared up at him, his lip trembling slightly.

“If we move him now he won’t get back to sleep for a while, and he’ll be muzzy and out of it. I can stick around until dinner, but you might want to get up and stretch.”

His shoulders were shaking too.

“Kid, are you okay?”

“P-please switch with me! Please!” Izuku whispered fiercely.

“Okay, just a moment.” Shouta raised an eyebrow but stepped forward. “Lift his head up a little, gently… like that, yeah.”

He supported Hitoshi’s neck as Izuku awkwardly squirmed sideways to get free.

And fell right off the couch.

Shouta raised an eyebrow.

“You okay, problem child?”

From this angle he couldn’t tell if the kid was starting to laugh or starting to cry.

“H-he-- he--” Maybe Izuku couldn’t tell either.

Stepping over the kid so he could take his seat on the couch, Shouta got Hitoshi’s head settled on his lap.

“Yes?”

“His head-- made my *leg* fall asleep!” The giggling boy on the carpet winced and started kneading at the pins and needles.

Shouta sighed.

“We thank you for your sacrifice,” he said drily, getting out his phone to let his husband know the kids were both fine.

Chapter End Notes

Izuku: I used to be an adventurer like you
Izuku: Then Hitoshi fell asleep on my heckin' leg.

also if anyone was wondering YES our boy DID almost say 'welcome home' when Shouta walked in

Summer Loafin'

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There was something about the warm green smell of a tree in summer that made every thought in Hitoshi's head go silent.

His hands were a mess of brown and green where he'd grasped moss-covered branches. His clothes weren't much better, honestly, but he'd at least managed to avoid getting leaves in his hair.

Izuku looked like he'd tumbled backwards through a bush, but he sat swinging his feet two branches higher than Hitoshi had managed, grinning ear to ear. The warm summer breeze ruffled his fluffy hair into even more of a mess.

They'd finished their finals, and now they'd climbed a tree. Summer break was already awesome.

They'd dropped their backpacks at Hitoshi's first, of course, and changed out of their uniforms. It was something of a rare treat, being able to spend their first free afternoon with no aikido practice or homework. No discussions of their finals or how well they thought they'd done in math or thinking up different possible strategies for when they were all heroes.

They'd dumped their backpacks and cuddled the caboodle of cats that came to welcome them and changed into ratty comfortable clothes (Izuku's well-loved "Tuxedo" t-shirt, Hitoshi's hand-me-down "Bite me □" tank-top that had originally been either Ingenium's or Aunt Nemu's), shucked their shoes with their jackets at the base of the tree, and climbed.

After a silent while, Izuku took his phone out and started to fiddle with it. Hitoshi assumed he was planning to take a picture or a video for Kouji, who had promised to join them later.

Instead, he played a recording of a crow cawing, three short bursts and then a pause. It sounded a little familiar, actually. Not entirely bird, although Hitoshi definitely wasn't an expert on caw language.

The small flock of crows inspecting a picnic table perked up, though. Hitoshi glanced at Izuku questioningly.

"Is... that what I think it is?" He asked.

Izuku played the recording again, watching the birds avidly. They had begun to ruffle and flap their wings.

“M-maybe?” he replied absently. The recording sounded again, slightly louder.

“Izu, if you are using a voice file from Kouji to get crows to come play with us--” Hitoshi got a slightly firmer grip on the trunk. “-- I may need to remind you of the movie ‘Birds.’”

“It’s not ‘come play,’ it- it’s more like ‘hello?’” Izuku assured him, leaning forward as one of the birds located the sound and daringly flew close. “A-and ‘friendly human,’” he added.

Hitoshi’s pitch raised slightly as two more birds came close, settling on a branch above his head. “And what exactly are you planning to do now?!”

“Th-the next part means ‘yummy food,’” Izuku explained, slowly reaching into his pocket. “I saved t-tamagoyaki from lunch.”

When the most daring crow made no move to come closer, Izuku broke off a piece of his egg roll and tossed it gently. The crow snapped it in his beak and ate with apparent enjoyment.

The birds above Hitoshi's head ruffled their wings and cawed loudly.

"Izu, this is cool and all but I really don't want to be surrounded by a flock of scary birds right now?" Hitoshi hunched his shoulders. His shirt might be old but that didn't mean he wanted to be pooped on.

"O-oh! Um, s-sorry!" Izuku hurriedly broke off two pieces to toss at Hitoshi's over-birds and set the rest on the branch next to him while he scrolled furiously on his phone. "Th-there's a 'go-away' one too, j-just a sec!"

While he was focusing on his phone, the first crow hopped onto the branch next to him and nabbed the rest of the egg roll.

Hitoshi really hoped they wouldn't get angry that all the food was gone.

"H-here!" Izuku's phone played a string of harsh caws, causing the crows near them to immediately take wing.

Hitoshi slumped back onto the tree trunk in somewhat exaggerated relief.

“I-I’m really sorry, Hicchan. I should have, um, should have asked.” Izuku’s slumped shoulders were almost as pitiful as his apologetic eyes.

With great effort, Hitoshi bit back the urge to say “It’s okay, you can call them all back!”

“It’s a cool idea,” he managed instead. “I bet you and Kouji wanted to see if his quirk would work over recordings. Just… maybe when we’re on the ground. And with Kouji around in case something goes wrong.”

He… really shouldn’t have watched that Hitchcock movie, honestly. Actually, the way Kouji could command birds to steal things from his bullies and poop on popular heroes was also a bit terrifying. In the best possible way, but still.

Hitoshi was glad Kouji only used his powers for good.

With another glance at the murder of crows talking to each other at the picnic bench, Hitoshi heaved a sigh.

“How long till Kouji gets here?” he asked.

Izuku’s shoulders straightened slightly. “H-he texted it’ll be about half an, an hour!”

Half an hour.

Hitoshi leaned against the trunk and shifted until he felt smooth cold bark against his cheek. The breeze smelled like green and warm pavement and a bit like fried fish from a nearby restaurant. The sun that reached them through beach-glass-green leaves was warm as a purring cat.

“We can try again in half an hour,” he promised.

Without even looking, he could see Izuku’s summer-bright grin.

Chapter End Notes

> Sorry this update took so long! I finally figured out how much I have left to write before I wrap this story up and start the sequel. It's... kind of a lot but I know where it's going now!

Shenanigans part 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The breeze picked up the dangling edges of his orange jacket, tied around his waist for convenience, and flapped them against his legs like wings. K-pop playing in one ear while wind whistled past the other, Kouji pumped his legs harder as his bike hit an incline.

He'd promised himself to bike more when summer vacation began but!

If he'd realized just how many hills there were between his bus stop and Hitoshi's apartment!

He would!

Have!

Walked!

With a huff, he reached the top of the street and began to coast down, fingers hovering at his handlebar brakes.

Still, at least there was a nice warm breeze. Even though his shoulders still ached from hours of test-taking and he had that stomach-sinking feeling that he should have studied a bit more diligently for history, the sun and the thin white clouds scudding across the sky made it hard not to smile.

Harder still when he finally reached the park in front of the Aizawa-Yamada's place and caught sight of his friends barefoot and tousle-headed in a tall tree.

"Yo, Kouji~"

"K-Kouji-kun!"

With a shrug, Kouji removed his earphone and stowed away his phone. Locking his bike near the park gates, he walked to the base of the tree and grinned up at his friends.

Happy summer break! He signed, waving his hands in silent cheers.

Happy summer break! Izuku responded, nearly enthusiastic enough to set his branch waving.

"You got permission to stay over, right?" Hitoshi asked, bouncing slightly. "Cuz Aunt Nemu volunteered to watch us and she always brings the *best* things."

Yes , Kouji responded, while he looked at the tree trunk measuringly. There weren't many good trees near his house, so he wasn't quite sure where to begin. He toed off his shoes and lined them up next to Izuku's fire-truck red sneakers.

"Want a hand up?" Izuku asked, starting to descend.

Kouji shook his head. With a flourish, he pulled off his socks and set the side of his foot against the trunk. If there were no branches for him to grasp yet…

He'd just treat it like climbing a drainpipe.

Hands clasped around the trunk, he set both feet at hip-height, knees splayed, and koala-ed his way up to the first reachable branch.

His jacket's sleeves threatened to un-knot from his hips, but he wasn't bothered. His phone and wallet were zipped into his cargo shorts anyway.

Considerately, his friends held off any questions until he'd settled in a forked branch near Hitoshi and had both hands free again.

How do you think you did on your tests? Kouji asked. He was expecting commiserating groans and shrugs in a 'well, at least it's over' kind of way.

Instead, Hitoshi full-body slumped backwards, flinging his arms above his head to hang upside down.

Izuku nearly ended up following as he gasped and jolted forward. What on Earth--

"We're DOOOOOOOONE!" Hitoshi hollered, voice slightly muffled by his sagging tank-top. "No! More! Schooooooooool!" All Kouji could see of his face was a puff of purple hair as he dangled.

“Hicchan! Please just, just sit upright!” Izuku pleaded.

“Izu, I am increasing blood flow to my brain. It’s healthy.” Hitoshi swung back and forth a few times to prove it.

If he doesn’t sit up, he’ll be increasing the blood flow from his HEAD, Kouji informed Izuku. He fished for his phone anyway.

“Hicchan, Kouji says--”

The camera clicked as Kouji framed the shot of Hitoshi the amazing dangling teenager. He decided to set it as his friend’s contact photo.

“Pft.” Hitoshi pulled his shirt back up. “Did one of you just take a picture?”

Kouji, phone in hand, pointed to Izuku. *He did it.*

“Wh-what?! I-- But!” Izuku sat forward, trying in vain to protest his innocence. From this angle, he could only see Kouji’s face fully.

“That’s messed up, Izu, you gotta ask permission first. Like so. Kouji, will you please take a photo of me?” Tucking his shirt into his belt, Hitoshi spread both arms wide and straight.

Of course. Kouji grinned, taking another picture.

“B-but I didn’t--”

“*Thank* you, Kouji.” Hitoshi winked.

Solemn, Kouji winked back.

Well, he tried anyway.

One of these days, for SURE he’d manage a wink with only one eye.

He did manage to get a photo of Hitoshi cracking up so hard he nearly laughed himself off his branch, though.

Izuku in the background had to catch his feet while smothering snickers.

“You only get one brain, Hicchan, pl-please don’t break it,” Izuku entreated, once they were all safely right-side up again.

Kouji sighed, *Don’t tempt him.*

“Don’t tempt me--hey!” Hitoshi turned to Kouji. “I am feeling *uncomfortably seen* right now!”

Kouji pretended to whistle as he looked away.

Tried to whistle.

He’d work on it after he mastered the wink, okay?

“Aaaaaaaaaah~” Hitoshi stretched his arms high over his head in a half-yawn, arching his back. “This is gonna be an EPIC summer.”

Chapter End Notes

By popular demand (read: because someone asked and I was tempted beyond reason), here is KOUJI'S KPOP PLAYLIST.

Shenanigans part 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The blur of child that ran, screaming like an angry kettle, *straight* into the foot of the plastic slide was, unfortunately, the same little tyke who'd tried to take Hitoshi hostage the last time he'd visited the park.

Well, not hostage as in 'take a step back or the hostage gets it.' Hostage as in 'I managed to make you play heroes and villains with me ONCE and therefore you must do what I say for the rest of eternity.'

Hitoshi wasn't sure if he pitied the kid's parents or if he was absolutely terrified of the authority who could look smiling at a tiny, shrieking Tasmanian Devil, say "Time to go for a nap~" and be *instantly* obeyed.

The kid plopped down to a seat, completely unfazed by his face-first collision with the play structure. His mom, an eagle-eyed woman with her dark hair in box-braids, looked the kid over when he turned her way and gave him a nod.

Hitoshi seized his chance to retreat.

"So, you two are thirsty, right? I'll be RIGHT back--" he promised, already sliding down the trunk to grab his shoes. Hiding in foliage would not save him.

...He'd tried that already.

“H-Hicchan!” Izuku called. “Kouji says get dango!”

“Sure thing!” Hitoshi rammed his feet into his sneakers, uncaring of the heel, and booked it for the corner store.

The kid’s mom shot him a smirk as he passed her, which was honestly THE most unsettling thing.

“So… do you w-want to start with the crows while he’s gone?” Izuku asked. Kouji shrugged and nodded, clambering down to Hitoshi’s vacated branch before swinging down to jump the rest of the way.

Izuku glanced at the distance between his sock-clad feet and his abandoned shoes and decided to take the slower way down.

He was glad he did, since an ungodly wail echoing from the play structure nearly made him lose his grip halfway down the trunk. The little guy who was, by the sounds of it, attempting to run up the slide while imitating an ambulance… probably didn’t have a sound enhancing quirk? Kids with THOSE tended to wear noise-cancelling masks in public, ever since a little girl’s tantrum on a crowded subway twenty years ago had nearly caused a devastating accident.

Still, the crows that had re-grouped near the benches were ruffling their feathers uncertainly.

Will they be bothered by the noise? Izuku asked, worrying at his lip with his teeth.

Kouji frowned, seeming to listen a little closer as they meandered slowly towards the birds. *They're discussing moving to a different park,* he affirmed.

Izuku looked hesitantly at the playground. He normally wouldn't even consider this, but. It had been a *really* long week. And he'd been looking forward to seeing if he could communicate with other animals with pre-recorded messages-- it was not only extremely cool, it could open up whole new avenues of possibility!

Mind made up, he signed, *Wait just a minute* to Kouji and headed toward the wailing slide.

Knocking gently on the reverberating plastic, he waited until the kid slid fully down to crouch to his eye-level. "U-um. Excuse me?"

The kid peered up at him from under an oversized baseball cap. His eyes were wary.

"Um." How did you speak to kids?? He really, really should have thought this through. "Me and my friend a-are, um. Trying to become friends with the crows here? And w-well, we were-- I mean, I was just w-w-wondering--" *Was* there even a polite way to tell a child to not make noise? Please and thank you?

The kid's eyes widened. "The crows--" his R's teetered precariously on the precipice of becoming "W's."-- "wan' a be friends?"

"M-hm! S-so if you don't mind--" Izuku persevered.

“MOMMA I’M MAKIN’ FRIENDS WITH CROWS NOW!” the kid hollered. His mother, eyes unwavering on the pair since Izuku first walked over, sent him a loving smile.

Izuku… folded like a wet paper towel.

“...Okay, um, b-before we go over to the birds, you need to be r- *really* quiet,” he tried. “Like going in a library, o-okay?”

The kid solemnly raised a finger to his lips and said “SHHHHHHHHHHH!”

Izuku had never been… extraordinarily strong against cute things but. Aghhhhh. This was. Wow.

“Crows *now?* ” the kid asked.

“Yes! Crows now!” Izuku had to tamp down his silly grin as he turned back to Kouji, who had a distinct expression of ‘*Did you really just*--’ as he looked between Izuku and his pint-size companion.

Izuku walked a little slower back to the bench Kouji had staked out, in consideration for the shorter legs trying to keep up. “I’m Izuku,” he introduced, belatedly. “My friend over there is Kouji, he talks mostly with his hands. He can talk to crows.”

The kid stared at Kouji, face considering under the shade of his baseball hat. “ *I’m* Kou-chan,” Kou-chan informed Izuku before clambering up to sit next to Kouji and stare a little harder. His introduction came with a hint of challenge. *I’m Kou-chan, and he isn’t*, came through clearly.

Kouji shot Izuku a Look, one in a series he'd perfected called '*What have you got me into this time*'. He smiled softly at Kou-chan, waving one hand at him and slowly forming two fists with each index finger raised, before curving his fingers gently at each other like strangers bowing.

"That m-means hello or good afternoon," Izuku translated. Kou-chan, looking between Kouji's hands, Izuku's red shoes, and the crows that had begun to move closer to their bench with an open-mouthed look of utter fascination, nodded somewhat absently.

"Crow friends N-" Izuku hurriedly put a finger to his own mouth to shush Kou-chan before he scared off the flock. "...now?" Kou-chan whispered.

Kouji looked at the kid bouncing at his side, and had to smile. *Tell him to stay very, very quiet,* he warned Izuku. *And not to move too much.*

Hurriedly, Izuku conveyed the instructions.

Kou-chan stuck both his hands under his legs and continued to bounce gently with excitement.

Izuku hurriedly sat down on the ground, facing Kouji so he could translate for Kou-chan if he said anything.

And Kouji grinned one last time at the starry-eyed pair, tossed his head back, and *cawed.*

Chapter End Notes

fun fact: i had a significant part of this chapter written a week

ago and then I was like. This child is far too well-behaved and cute. He needs to be Energetic, Loud, and a Handful. So uh.

This chapter brought to you by my one-year-old puppy who likes to believe he's more mature than a four-year-old.

A Companion to Crows

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

All things considered, Hitoshi shouldn't have been shocked to come back to the park, hands cold from juggling three bottles of Aquarius and a bag of corner-store treats, to see Izuku and Kouji sitting with a bouncing toddler in the center of the flock of crows.

The birds were quiet and still, ruffling their feathers idly. That was somehow more disquieting than if they'd been loud.

The kid was completely silent, even as he rocked in place on the bench. THAT was the most disquieting part, Hitoshi decided.

"Wow. I see how it is. I see what's going on here," he accused, stepping carefully around the calm birds to drop the snacks in Izuku's lap. "I go to the store out of the goodness of my heart to keep YOU ALL fed and watered… and you immediately replace me."

Izuku grinned up at him, squinting slightly in the sunlight like a tired kitten. "Th-thank you!"

Kouji, on the other hand, opened his eyes wide in feigned shock. *Hi-To-Shi?* He looked between Hitoshi and the giggling tot. *I swear, I had no idea Izuku went to get someone younger and better looking than you. I just thought you shrunk and took a long nap.*

"…" Hitoshi briefly considered going in for a noogie. No, Kouji would immediately throttle him. "I feel *all* kinds of appreciated right now," he huffed. "Give me the dango, Izuku, I want to drown my sorrows."

Kouji cocked his head. The crow on the seat beside him echoed it. Hitoshi sat down entirely on purpose and in no way because he was startled.

You DID get dango! Thank you for the dango, Kouji signed, grinning. With a sigh, Hitoshi surrendered.

“Yeah, I got your favorite. Eat it quick, Aunt Nemu called to say she’d be here in half an hour.” He mournfully passed the container of mitarashi dango up to Kouji’s grabby hands. Izuku, kind-hearted soul, found the old-fashioned donut he liked and fished it out of the bag for him.

He’d make sure Izu got the cushy sleeping bag tonight, in honor of this moment.

The temporarily quiet hellion sitting next to Kouji widened his eyes at the sight of sugar. “CAN I--” he looked at the birds that had backed away from the sound. “... c’n I have some?” he whispered, before putting one finger over his mouth and ‘shh’ing himself.

Hitoshi refused to find anything about this moment cute.

Izuku folded like a wet paper towel, about to hand over the sour gummies at the bottom of the bag.

Not without asking his parents, Kouji cautioned, pointing at the woman lounging against the park gates watching them like… well, like the hungry murder-birds eyeing his poor donut.

Izuku translated for the tiny one, who peeped at his mother and immediately wilted into an obedient child.

“I’m not sposed to have princessed sugar,” he muttered, putting his hands back under his knees.

Hitoshi and Kouji blinked at each other, before--

“P-processed?” Izuku asked.

That made more sense.

Izuku slowly put his sour gummies back in the bag and hid them in his lap. Hitoshi shrugged and took a bite out of his donut.

Wasn’t there some saying about eating candy in front of a baby? Taking candy from a baby? Maybe it was just the lingering resentment from, as previously mentioned, being FORCED TO PLAY VILLAINS AND HEROES FOR THREE ENTIRE HOURS, but that donut? It tasted like sweet, sweet victory.

The murder-birds were getting a little closer than he was comfortable with, though.

One of them hopped up beside the mini-terror to stare directly at the food in his hand. The kid, mesmerized, slowly reached a hand to pat the bird’s wing--

Kouji gently caught his arm and pulled it back. “M-mm,” he hummed,

shaking his head.

“Can’t touch?” the kid asked, lower lip pushed out to the max.

Izuku did that face better, just saying.

Wild animals don’t like to be touched, Kouji signed slowly, waiting for Izuku’s interpretation. *They could get scared and bite you.*

“Oh.” The kid nodded, enlightened. “I bit Yuki-kun last week.”

Kouji pushed a fist against his mouth, trying to cover his snorts of laughter. Izuku unconsciously pulled his legs a little farther away from the kid, eyes wide.

Hitoshi swallowed a mouthful of donut and the urge to make any jokes about rabies shots. “… thank you for sharing. I’m… so glad I know that. Aren’t you glad you know that, Izu?”

Izuku’s wide eyes turned to him. Kouji doubled over, finally losing the fight with his laughter. Drunken squirrel giggles serenaded them.

Hitoshi took advantage of the moment to pull the bag from Izuku’s lap.

“Wh--?”

“Princessed sugars are bad for you, Izu,” he informed him, expertly

splitting open the bag to steal a sour worm.

Ahhhh. Like taking candy from a baby.

In the thirty seconds before Izuku scowled and reached out to grab the bag back, reached again, jumped up and ran madly after him… Hitoshi regretted nothing.

Chapter End Notes

Kou-chan: does The Face

Hitoshi: I'mma let you finish but Izuku had one of the greatest Puppy Eyes Face of ALL TIME--

To all readers-- thank you so much for the kind comments, they make me smile every time I read them. I know it's a really rough time for a lot of people right now, and it feels like there's not a lot we can do to make it better. I hope you and the people you care about are well. I hope you stay safe. And I guess what I really want to say is… if you came here looking for a little spot of brightness, I hope you found it.

Aunts Rush In (Where Parents Fear to Tread)

Chapter Notes

> This'll be the last chapter for a while, although I have about eight more planned before the sequel. Reasons are in the end-note, which you're welcome to skip.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first time Nemuri Kayama met her nephew, he was threatening to run away.

Hizashi, looking ready to tear his hair out by the roots, grimaced at her from the doorway, where he sat a prudent distance away from a kid that gangled defiantly next to the shoe rack. The kid's arms gently cradled a knapsack that had definitely seen better days, half-squashed and lumpy-looking.

The kid had spooked when she walked in, and he backed further into his corner to keep both her and Hizashi in his sights.

She'd raised her unarmed hands slowly, breathing slow and deep. "Hey kiddo. What's going on?"

"I am running away." The kid glared between them, grip tightening on his bag. From the unzipped top, she could see the bright eyes of a barely weaned cat.

"Hmm...." She swept a glance over Hizashi, visibly exhausted from the wonders of parenthood. His ridiculous cockatoo hair wilted over his shoulders. "Valid. Where you goin'?"

Utter silence.

From both of them.

Nemuri took a moment to appreciate the slack-jawed confusion on Hizashi's face. It looked terrible on him.

"Cuz if you just don't think this is working out, we can take some space and talk things over away from these two bozos. Or, we could get in a car, take that kitten you're holding to get checked over by the vet, and maybe grab something sinfully fatty on our way back. Hmm?"

He hadn't said a word in the car. Glanced at her furtively in the vet's office before he tersely explained where and how he'd found the mewling kitten, a pretty little white and gray thing once all the grime had been washed off with a warm towel.

When they left the vet, she drove aimlessly, circles upon circles, while the kid cradled his sleeping kitten.

Finally,

"...They won't let me keep her," he murmured, hoarse.

"Have you tried asking?" Hands at 12 and 2 on the wheel, voice neutral, eyes forward. The kid flinched anyway.

"No." Voice a defeated rasp, but he wasn't crying.

"I'll ask, then." She set a route for her friends' apartment, flashing him a grin. "And if you need to run away again, I can come get you, okay kiddo?"

The kid grimaced. "Hitoshi."

"Okay, Hitoshi. I'm Nemuri, but you can call me--"

"Aunt Nemu!"

Nemuri heard the boys before she saw them, which was saying something because two of them mainly communicated in hand signs and murmurs.

"AUNT NEMU, HELP!" Hitoshi bellowed, sprinting past her.

“GET HIM IZU,” a shrill voice shrieked. Izuku pelted by, barely sparing her a glance in his hurry.

That had to be the closest she’d ever seen that cute little face get to murderous. Generously, she pulled her sweater free from her waist and turned around, waiting for her chance. Hitoshi wouldn’t run out into the road, so he’d be…. Ah.

Just as she’d thought.

As the gangly teen made to run past her again, she lassoed him with the sweater and imprisoned him in a hug. “Get him, Izukkun!” she cheered, digging a few fingers in Hitoshi’s most tickle-some ribs.

Panting lightly, the shorter boy stepped closer and pulled a bag of sour gummies from Hitoshi’s hands with a vindictive yank. He also, she was proud to see, hopped up on tiptoes to give Hitoshi a quick noogie.

“Ahahahahaha!” Hitoshi wriggled sideways, batting away her hands. He wasn’t double-tapping, though, which was their usual sign for ‘stop.’ With a smooth bend of her knees and a practiced hoist, Nemuri lifted him over her shoulder and jostled him like a particularly bony sack of laundry. She turned slightly away from Izuku to keep him out of kicking range. Hitoshi had startle reflexes like a mule when he was laughing.

She still snickered, thinking of the bruises on Hizashi’s ribs their first full-family sleepover, when a mix of waffles for dinner and a tickle fight had sent Hitoshi into a ten-minute fit of helpless, thrashing giggles. Her friend had been so new-dad proud, lifting his shirt up the next day to show off to Lunch Rush and Vlad King. He wouldn’t even let Chiyo kiss it better, saying he needed to keep the marks as proof to show to his co-host that night.

Izuku, the sweetheart, bent to pick up her sweater from the ground and dusted it off as he followed her to Kouji and their new companion.

Hitoshi sighed, a full-body procedure as he let his legs dangle pointedly. As they walked, he silently, reproachfully, *gangled* over her shoulder.

She shifted him slightly higher with a *"hup!"* and grinned at Kouji and at the toddler watching open-mouthed from within a circle of crows.

"Ready to go?" she asked, checking around for any backpacks or missing items. Kouji pointed at a bike locked to the park fence, but that seemed to be all.

"No more crows?" the absolutely precious little miniature lisped, face set on the 'pout' end of the scowl scale.

Kouji and Izuku traded hesitant looks.

Kouji shrugged, signing*, Give a recording?* With a nod to the only other adult in the park, who was wending her way over.

"Izumi-san? This is your spawn?" Nemuri asked, delighted. *Years* of passing acquaintance and not a single baby photo shared! She was almost offended!

Mrs. Izumi's face hit maximum capacity on the scowl scale. Hitoshi, the only one currently facing a separate direction, flailed slightly as he heard Izuku's tiny *meep!* of fear.

“Kou-chan, what do we say to the nice boys?” Mrs. Izumi asked, sugar-sweet despite her narrowed eyes. Ignoring Nemuri and her shoulder-load of nephew entirely, which was… fair.

Kou-chan slid down off of his bench with a huff and bobbed a bow, short and sincere. His little devil-horned hat nearly flopped off his head. "Thank you for playing with me," he lilted, sing-song in that way kids had of mirroring their parents.

Izuku approached Mrs. Izumi to hesitantly offer to send his crow command recordings through LINE.

With his pink round face and that bushy green hair, he kind of looked like a stunted strawberry, Nemuri mused. She shifted Hitoshi slightly to shift his sharp ribs away from her shoulder, and ruffled Izuku's leaf-riddled hair with her free hand.

"Come on boyos! The parents are away, and I brought UA-official recordings of sports festivals for the last five years. Let the party begin!"

"Yayyyy," Hitoshi deadpanned over her shoulder, the tone of voice of a teenager mid-sarcastic-jazz-hands. She jostled him against her shoulder one last time before setting him loose.

Kouji waved a grinning goodbye to Kou-chan, and came forward to greet her, polite as anything.

Polite as a teenager who almost immediately elbowed his lanky friend in the ticklish ribs. Nemuri approved.

"Alright, I got three of you—last chance to steal another kid, eh, Izumi-san? Oop, she's ignoring me. Anyway, sprogs, say your goodbyes and let's skedaddle!" She winked at little Kou-chan waving goodbye to his new friends and led the charge to Hitoshi's home.

Maybe this time she'd manage not to make a huge mess of their kitchen, but, eyeing the bag of pancake mix wedged in with her DVDs and sleepover kit... probably not!

Chapter End Notes

I want to write something to everyone who's ever read my stories, like
If you liked this
If you thought this family was good and happy and healthy
It's because I have the best possible parents
It's because my mother is a fucking amazon of protection and love
It's because my dad took the time to read an entire harry potter book in one night to be able to tell his kids that no cats were harmed or killed in this one
And that he always did that every book after, to be sure to tell us if anyone died
It's that he would read rhyming books and mix up the lines just to make us laugh
And he coached three soccer teams so we could learn his favorite sport
And he didn't speak Spanish at home but he made sure we had lessons when we wanted them
And he'd tell us stories from his childhood in Africa and England and Mexico so we'd know how big the world was
Any humor, any love, any light that comes through my words comes from the warmth of my home
Anything good I am, is because I grew up loved and loving.
I want people to know I have the best, the most loving, the kindest and most generous, the funniest, the dance in the store kind, the pick you up in the pool and toss you gently so you shriek, the tell terrible jokes and laugh before you finish, the make you snort while drinking milk, the absolute best parents.

I haven't updated this story recently because the last few weeks have been insane and my dad is gone now. I read this to him two

weeks ago, and I wanted to add it here, not to bring anyone down, but to acknowledge that in every work I write, in every scene of love and trust, he is there. I love you so much, Dad.

Louder than sirens, louder than bells

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Even without Mr. Yamada and Mr. Aizawa, Hitoshi's apartment seemed full to the brim with sound-- Ms. Nemuri swearing softly in the kitchen as she accidentally splashed pancake batter across the counter, Hitoshi cackling and dragging his fingers through the mess to smear it on Izuku's face, and the panicked slap of feet against floorboard as Izuku darted behind Kouji to evade. Over, under, and through the mayhem, long mewls of cat commentary added an extra layer to the chaos.

Izuku nearly tripped over Support, who was ambling towards the kitchen to investigate the mess being made on the counter-- **You kick Support? You punt Support like football?!**-- and startled Leon when he collapsed on the couch, weak with giggles--**Pillow? Pillow leak air? Pillow weak balloon Pillow**-- prompting the ginger cat to walk gingerly across the cushions and bat at the boy's face with a tentative paw. Kouji grinned and sat on the cushion next to his head, offering his hand for Leon to sniff. The rest of the cats waylaid Hitoshi when he passed the treats jar--**Starving! Seven years without food! Hunger! FoodfoodfoodfoodTREAT!**-- and wailed piteously until he relented.

From the tight, warm ache across his cheeks, Kouji was certain he'd never smiled this long, this hard before in his life.

There were nine voices vying for his attention, nine gleeful, miffed, bemused, cajoling voices and his wasn't-- wouldn't be-- one of them. No matter how hard he smiled, his tongue pressed silent behind his teeth, his lungs filled and emptied like a wind instrument without a player. Sometimes he thought of it like a riddle, like a paradox-- *What's the loudest bell that never rings? A diving bell. What's the loudest mouth that never sings? Kouda Kouji.*

But.

"Kouda, any preferences for fruit in your pancakes?" Ms. Kayama asked, without looking over her shoulder. Before he could take a moment to deflate, to feel-- *anything*, he heard Hitoshi clear his throat and felt Izuku nudge the top of his head against Kouji's ribs.

They hadn't had to turn. They didn't need to adjust even a little to see him. Izuku's eyes met his in silent question.

Kouji shifted his fingers in practiced movements and-- "He likes bananas!" Hitoshi called.

I like them too, Izuku signed, syrup-slow in a way that broke over like a contented yawn.

"Make that two bananas," Hitoshi amended. "And one chocolate-blueberry for me."

Izuku's eyes widened and he and Kouji mirrored, unconsciously, the way they dragged their hands up and pulled them down, thumb and index pinched together repeatedly. *Me too me too me too!!*

"Chocolate chips for all-- Izuku budge up a bit--" Hitoshi nudged Izuku's legs aside to perch on the arm of the couch, one leg pulled up so he could prop his arm on it for a chin-rest. For arguably the tallest of them-- Kouji argued otherwise but he'd been informed that the peak of his head really counted as hair, honestly-- Hitoshi certainly folded up small.

The conversation meandered lazily like the idle flicks of Support's tail as she kneaded the carpet by Kouji's feet, but throughout it all he could feel it.

Even when Izuku shifted to settle further into the couch and Hitoshi flitted back into the kitchen to help chop the fruit, he could feel it.

One or both of them, apart or together-- they watched. They kept their eyes on his hands, on his face.

They were *listening.*

From technically upside-down and slightly sideways, Izuku met his eyes-- glancing eye contact, almost incidental. As observant as Izuku could be, he never made you feel like he was staring.

It's loud in here? He signed one-handed, eyebrows raised in question. *You need quiet?*

Kouji rubbed a hand against his cheek, smile-sore. *Pretty loud*, he agreed. *But I'm okay*.

With a nod, Izuku turned back to the matter at hand.

Well.

Arm.

"Do you think he--" Izuku's voice was as quiet as the rumbling purr against his shoulder. **Pillow warm pillow** Leon approved. "--is g-gonna let me up to eat dinner?"

Kouji glanced solemnly at the puddle of ginger fur immobilizing Izuku's left arm. He bit his lip as Leon began gently rubbing his head against Izuku's shoulder, shifting slightly to be able to scent-mark more of the fabric. He considered the way that Izuku's eyes were beginning to water, and the fact that his friend had, again, forgotten to take his allergy medication.

Maybe, he postulated, *if you start sneezing a lot? But not likely.*

Izuku's wide eyes widened further, then a little more as he turned his head to the side. Leon purred, rolling with him to butt against his cheek with a whiskery jaw.

"Are y-- a- are y--" Izuku fought valiantly. Bravely. Briefly. "k'CHEW!" The sneeze won.

Hitoshi cheered from the kitchen, possibly about something entirely unrelated.

Pillow stay flat pillow Leon admonished.

Kouji smiled so wide he was briefly worried he might crack something. *Yeah, I'm pretty sure.*

Izuku sighed. "W-worth a try," he muttered.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter-related notes:

The chapter title comes from Florence + The Machine's

Drumming Song, because I had the chorus of Hardest of Hearts stuck in my head while writing this but the lyrics didn't really fit the chapter. Neither does the drumming song, really, but it fit *better*.

The riddle of the loudest mouth is a reference to the fact that Kouda's name contains the character for "mouth" (and his first name can be translated as 'high voice').

The sign for "same" or "me too" in Japanese sign language looks like this: https://shuwa-rinrin.com/0024_same_me-too/

Non-chapter notes:
I have seen all of your comments over the past six (and a bit) months. On the darkest days, you have no idea how helpful it was to see a simple "This made me smile." This particular chapter has been in the works for over a month, and it's as much an early Christmas gift to myself as a late Hanukkah/Thanksgiving gift to any and all readers. I never wanted to promise anything I couldn't give, but I think I can safely say now that this story is not abandoned and will continue to update. I still plan on a sequel for the boyos in UA shenanigans, although updates may not be regular. Thank you for commenting, for reading, for liking my story. Thank you, and best wishes!

And Now, What You've All Been Waiting For

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The last streaks of pink-tinged light crept across the kitchen counter as Hitoshi wiped away stubborn streaks of pancake batter. He could hear Aunt Nemu in the next room swearing over the cables as she hooked his laptop up to the TV, and the comforting buzz of Izu's muttering over his notebook as he showed Kouji some of the profiles he'd written. Somewhere nearby cicadas were greeting the dusk with a chittering hum, loud enough he could almost feel the buzzing against his skin.

Summer always seemed to arrive slow, but it hit like a hammer once it came.

Entering the family room, he couldn't help the grin that stole over his face. Kouji and Izuku were curled up on the couch, overrun with purring cats. Luna had stolen a march on the rest and curled proudly on Kouji's shoulder, her wide blue eyes trained on Izuku's fluffy head while he giggled helplessly.

Aunt Nemu waved at him from the carpet where she'd been setting up the connection to their ancient TV, turning the laptop so he could see the lock-screen. "Log in and you should be all set to go, kiddo." With a theatrical groan, she stretched and stood up to take her spot on the recliner next to the couch.

Her spot, which was currently occupied. Nemuri sighed. "Nana. Baby. Honey-child. We go through this every time."

Nana, curled in a ginger ball atop Aunt Nemu's discarded sweater, flicked an ear in choreographed disinterest.

"Nana, you gorgeous little bastard," Nemuri cooed. "I didn't want it to come to this." Izuku was snickering already.

Nana flexed her paws into soft wool, without opening her eyes.

Aunt Nemu turned, pointing at each of the boys in turn. "I warned her. You all witnessed it."

Kouji nodded solemnly. Hitoshi, knowing what was coming, stifled a laugh as he crouched in front of his laptop.

"Butt incoming! BUTT. INCOMING~" Nemuri sang out, trying to worm one hand under Nana's sweater nest. "You better move your ass 'cuz a bigger one's approaching~"

Nana *mrr*ed in discontent and rolled away from the encroaching hand, wriggling like she was attempting a backstroke with only her shoulders.

"Beware the butt~~" Nemuri continued, snaking both arms under the sweater and scooping it, cat and all, into her lap as she twisted and flopped backward into the chair.

Nana yowled once in protest before snuggling back into a ball. This time it was Kouji's turn to swallow down a chuckle.

You don't want to know what she just called you, he informed Nemuri.

"But I'm pretty sure I could guess!" Hitoshi finished brightly, settling himself back against the couch next to Izuku. Kouji, at the other end, stuck his tongue out, which led to a brief war of silly faces before Izuku leaned forward to press play.

(Nemuri decisively won the battle, when she managed to cross her eyes and then move one independent of the other.)

"Shhh! It's starting!" Izuku warned, eyes fixed on the screen. Hitoshi could feel a shift on the couch cushions as his friend unconsciously began to rock back and forth with excitement.

Luna appeared utterly entranced by the shifting of his fluffy head, darting out a paw to catch the nearest curl each time it passed.

The video began with a thrumming of noise-- cheers, clapping, the fading strains of the UA school song as the camera swept over a riotous crowd. Present Mic's signature "YEEEEEAAAAAHHHHHH" sparked off a cacophony of applause… including on their couch, Hitoshi was amused to note.

Kouji even fluttered his fingers in silent applause to complement Izuku's cheerful clapping.

"Welcome to the 20th annual UA Sports Festival! This year, as a special treat, underground hero Eraserhead will be my co-commentator. We are so excited to present our first year hero class!" Yama-dad was in full radio-show voice. Hitoshi directed a glance to his left. He was… indescribably tempted to pull out his phone and start filming.

"…Yo." Even through the speakers, Aizawa's voice came through clear, low and raspy with his utter lack of enthusiasm.

Three things happened when the sound hit, either simultaneously or so close as to make no difference:

Kouji's hands flew to his mouth, covering a loud gasp.

Luna gathered herself to leap at her target.

And poor Izuku, caught midway between rocking forward and jumping to his feet….

Ended up launching himself face-first into the carpet with a noise halfway between "excited yelp" and "squeaky toy."

"Izu-- you-- you okay there, bud?" Hitoshi managed to strangle down his laughter with great difficulty. Luna, freaked out by the noise, scrambled her way to the top of Kouji's head and gathered herself into a small bean shape, eyes wide.

Izuku slowly slid forward, shoulder-first, until he lay flat on the floor. The squeak gained traction.

Hitoshi nudged him in the shin with his toes. "Izu, are you … breathing in at all?"

His friend audibly gulped in a breath. Muffled by the carpet, he managed to yelp, "Y-y-y-your h-head is erASERDAD?!?"

"Uh… heh…" Hitoshi grinned weakly. "Sur…prise?"

Kouji looked between the two of them and, with a sigh, slid off the couch to join Izuku on the floor, patting gently at his back. This time, he mainly sounded like a balloon sadly leaking air.

"I'll just… pause this until you un-puddle," Hitoshi offered.

The leaky balloon nodded slowly.

Chapter End Notes

To all my readers who continue to check up on this story and comment, thank you from the bottom of my heart! This chapter has honestly been... months in the making but sometimes you have to let go of perfectionism and just finish the thing. Other chapters (hopefully!) coming soon, thank you for reading!

Also, special mention to my sister's "dog,"* who has taken to sitting on my side of the couch every single day purely, I believe, for the pleasure of being gently chivvied out of the way to the tune of "Butt incoming! Beware the butt!"

*Dog in this case is in quotation marks because he does not bark, he is ten pounds of pure fluff, and his greatest joy is to scamper across your keyboard so he can curl up at your side and pensively lick your blanket for an uncomfortably long period of time. #notadog

To sleep, perchance to

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The thing about lying on the ground, really, was that emotionally it was absolutely right where Izuku wanted to remain. Right here, face down, preferably for a year or two, maybe the cats could join him, he could drink tea through a straw and just… exist. Here. In this carpet.

Unfortunately, the physical reality of lying, face down, on his friend's carpet, was that. Well. He was fairly sure he'd already inhaled cat fur, his right cheek seemed to have rugburn from when he fell, and he could feel an absolute thunderstorm of sneezes building even though he'd already taken Benadryl.

So, like. The spirit was all for pausing existence as a carpet puddle, but the flesh was severely allergic.

He sat himself up and watched the rest of the Sports Festival footage because that was their plan and he drank hot tea and tried not to rub at his eyes too much even though they were allergy-itchy and probably really really red and he brushed his teeth and helped Kouji lay their futons next to Hitoshi's… and that whole time, he felt a fragile ache at the back of his throat, at the base of his eyes, like it was pressing closer heartbeat by heartbeat.

The thing about crying was, usually it didn't feel like much. Just a normal, human reaction. Because, come on, he wasn't a monster. If someone showed him a video of a little puppy hiccupping so loudly she startled herself awake and started barking, of course he was going to tear up a little, because she was so *small* and it looked like it *hurt a little* and her little black eyes were so *wet* and.

Well, he felt a little wobbly even thinking about it but anyway. That was normal. That was a *usual reaction*.

What he felt, that night, chewing on the incontrovertible truth of 'Mr. Aizawa is Underground Pro Hero Eraserhead,' was more like… the barrier between himself and utter breakdown was chipped down eggshell thin. Watching a startlingly high number of techno-quirked first years fight each other, he had sucked in a shuddering breath as he remembered, *Pro Hero Eraserhead drives me home from aikido*. He'd had to knuckle away a tear while he was brushing his teeth because *Pro Hero Eraserhead hugged me after I got bullied*. And thrumming behind it all in the background, steady and strong as a heartbeat, the absolutely impossible, unbelievable…. Truth?

He murmured his goodnights to Kouji and Hitoshi, trying not to feel guilty when they traded worried glances as the lights switched off.

And as he heard their breathing slow into sleep, he finally turned to his side and let the first, burning tears slide across the bridge of his nose and down his cheek, arms clamped tight against his sides to stop the trembling because *Pro Hero Eraserhead thinks **I** can be a **hero***.

When he finally reached the quiet, aching weariness of the thoroughly cried-out, he shifted to lie more fully on his pillow, wiping the wet from his face.

Slowly enough that it didn't surprise him, a warm hand cupped his shoulder and patted it gently. Izuku let out a short, wet laugh.

"I'm okay now," he whispered. "Thanks, Kouji."

With a gentle squeeze, the hand withdrew.

If he hadn't been so tired, Izuku definitely would have teared up again. Pro Hero Eraserhead, and Hitoshi and Kouji, Present Mic and Midnight and his mom… Even meeting All Might, no matter how it had gone…

The Izuku from one year ago never would have believed how lucky he'd been to have so many people he cared about.

So many people who, as much as he couldn't believe it…

Really believed in *him*.

Chapter End Notes

A very short chapter for this week, but hopefully a good one!

Also, this is what was going through my mind at the very end there:

Izuku: I'm crying my hardest!
Izuku: Trying. Sorry. Damn autocorrect.
Kouji: You said that out loud, though?

Bittersweet seasons

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sometime in the night, a summer shower had passed over the city, scattering still pools on the pavement like mirror shards lit with pink and purple in the morning light.

Izuku, who usually only woke up with great reluctance to the ring of his third morning alarm, was only in a position to appreciate the dawn in its hushed glory due to Nana.

Specifically, due to Nana's position *planted on his face* at 3 a.m. until he suffocated himself awake and followed her into the kitchen.

Moving quietly in the sleeping apartment, he'd retrieved notebook and pencil from his backpack, and set the electric kettle to boil for tea. When morning broke in full, it found him scribbling half-formed plans one-handed, absently running his fingers through Nana's silky fur as she circled him, rubbing ears and nose against his pajamas.

Ms. Nemuri was the first to join him, waving a quiet "'Morning" before she brewed coffee and refilled the cats' food dishes.

Kouji was next, surrounded by a clowder of cats very intent on getting him to watch them eat. Izuku grinned at his friend's sleepy chirps and meows as he patiently answered each cat's interjections. It was, objectively speaking, *utterly hecking cute*.

Hitoshi sauntered in not long after, completely sanguine to the fact that half his hair lay flat against his cheek while the rest reached for

the sky. Izuku, with great grace, refrained from taking a photo to use the next time Hitoshi teased him about his "shrubbery of a haircut."

Kouji had already taken one, in any case.

As they all settled on the couches with respective warm drinks, Izuku asked, "D-did you know there's a set of genes that make coffee taste more bitter? Or, well, to be able to taste the bitterness *in* coffee."

Kouji slow-blinked. *I did not.*

"Tell me more, Izu," Hitoshi added, sipping his milk and sugar with coffee.

"W-well, people have different levels of, um, ability to taste bitter things… like tannins. In coffee and chocolate. Kind of like how birds can eat chili peppers because they can't, um, taste capsaicin. So-- so people who can drink really bitter coffee without milk can probably, um, not taste the tannins."

Now that Hitoshi was looking carefully, Izuku's hair seemed to be trembling slightly.

"That's pretty cool…" he said slowly. "Why did you happen to think of it?"

Izuku grinned ear to ear. "I-I think it might be, um, recessive? Because my mo- my mom can drink bitter things no problem but I find it too strong so--"

Ignoring Hitoshi's dawning look of a mystery solved at last, Kouji waved a hand, *Izuku, before we woke up, did you maybe--*

"A-and Miss Nemuri made coffee this morning and it actually ta-tasted really good!" Izuku was actually bouncing gently in his seat, which apparently was just fine with Nana, who simply turned slightly in his lap.

Oh dear, Kouji said.

"S-so I had two cups
andIdidsomethinkingaboutourtrainingforUAandmaybeweshoulddosomebalan
Izuku blurted, smiling wider than ever.

Hitoshi contemplated following a caffeine-hyped Izuku as he scrambled up fire escapes and jumped across buildings.

He did not need to contemplate for long.

Taking a final sip of his coffee, Hitoshi matched Izuku's grin. "Well, I think I heard a 'let's go iceskating' in there."

Kouji set his tea down to rub Luna's head and shrugged. *Yeah, that sounds good.*

Nana, finally unsettled by her pillow's antics, sprung lightly from his lap to try to tip Kouji's mug off the table.

Kouji rescued it by a hair. *Maybe we should walk to the rink, though.* He

cast an eye at Izuku, who was now watching his own shaking hands with wide eyes. *Give us some time to wait out the shakes.*

"YAY!" Izuku cheered, pumping a fist. "OkaysotherinkIfoundisatamallindowntownMusutafu,a-and…"

Hitoshi and Kouji shared a look steeped in fondness as Izuku's mutters grew faster and less comprehensible.

First day of summer break and they were going ice-skating. Well, at least the rink would probably be pretty empty.

With every kid clamoring to go to beaches and amusement parks, who would want to ice-skate on a sunny day?

Chapter End Notes

who, indeed, could they meet at an ice-skating rink in the middle of musutafu?

title is a very small reference to Sara Bareilles's "Bittersweet," because I was listening while baking.

this chapter is somehow both two days and like five months later than i planned to post it, HUGE THANK YOU to everyone reading this story for your continued interest despite the long hiatus.

Shout-out as well to SpaceMarz, whose adorable fanart of Todoroki's french braid can be found here, it absolutely brightened my day ^_^: https://twitter.com/MarsXur/status/1476823596790165506?t=bVazkpBvUQrBW-sJ6LWigQ&s=

I'm Only Happy When It Rains (Pour Your Misery Down On Me)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Shouto woke with the rain at his window at 2 am and collected his headphones and walkman from his desk. Endeavor was out of the county for the next week, working on a joint case between his agency and… some other hero, Shouto hadn't asked. Regardless of the reason, the man's absence meant he didn't have to stay in his room if he didn't want to.

Wrapped in his comforter, Shouto shuffled through the silent house to sit by the windows overlooking the backyard. From the second story, the sudden rain shower looked like strings of glass beads or bright pearls, catching light from the street lamps as quickly as they slipped away from it. Whispering through the chinese synth-song from one of Touya's CDs, he could hear the steady *shh-shh-shh* of puddles forming, the odd high-toned *plink* when rain hit the gutters instead.

He rested his right hand against the window, watching the feathery tendrils of frost form on the other side of the pane as he gently leached the heat from it.

The synth faded, replaced by a min'yo, one of Fuyumi's favorites. Then from Natsuo, a takaradzuka cover of a musical he'd never seen. English punk, min'yo again, a German song Touya must have downloaded at some point, an anime theme-song Fuyumi had on USB…

Shouto may not have spoken much with his siblings, may not even remember Touya's face now beyond a head of red hair with blue-flame eyes, a smile that had never been aimed his way… but he did have this.

This, definition: An eclectic library of all the CD's he'd found while sneaking in his siblings' rooms, accomplished one afternoon when he was eight, curious, and unsupervised with access to a personal computer. Organized according to no rhyme or reason, soothing like slightly burnt home cooking.

Technically, one could say he had stolen the music… but legally, he wasn't so sure. The music was still there, after all. All he'd done was burn it.

(Wouldn't his father be *proud*. One thing even Shouto would choose to burn.)

Fuyumi found him there in the morning, flushed face drooping against the window pane. Sunlit ice formed a halo where his forehead met glass.

He woke before she could set a hand on his shoulder. She smiled and left, hushed as morning light.

The days when Endeavor was gone, silence soaked their house until Shouto felt like an earthworm in a rainstorm, struggling to breathe free above the suffocating weight.

In the absence of unrelenting flame and thunderous shouting, the remainder of their family lived in echoes.

Natsuo, who spent hours in his room talking on the phone, or chatting with Fuyumi in the kitchen, reserved his silence for his father… and his brother. The few words he spoke to Shouto fell clipped and abrupt, like the door he slammed behind him when he left for university.

Fuyumi, whose smile was the only thing softer than her voice, who curled into herself with rounded shoulders and long bangs, seemed always on the verge of trying to say something when Endeavor called him to the dojo to train. Over the years, Shouto had learned to stop hoping that she would.

If Shouto could break his siblings' silence, he might have asked how Mother looked when they visited her. He might have asked to join them to visit Touya's grave, to hear stories about his oldest brother who hid synth music CDs behind his desk.

He might have mentioned the terrible awareness growing in him since his birthday-- that at age 14, he had already outlived the sibling who burned so brightly and briefly in his memories, who he had once heard shouting back at Endeavor. (Back when he was five and bandaged and bed-rested, back when the house echoed with Mother's absence and no one knew that the five remaining in their home would soon be reduced to four).

Towards this figure who passed away when he was five, Shouto had nothing but unfulfilled curiosity, which sunk in his chest as deep as regret.

Wrapped in the chill of the early morning, Shouto watched sun catch the silvered patches of rain spill, setting them alight. In his ears, the walkman continued playing, a piano instrumental from some animated movie he'd never seen.

In his ears, his mother's words echoed, rendered in the vague memory

of a quiet, kind voice.

It is entirely your choice, what you decide to do, and who you decide to become.

After a brief breakfast, after making his bed and changing into loose jeans, Shouto grabbed his wallet and subway card and nodded to Fuyumi as he headed out the door. He chose one of Touya's loudest songs as he started walking, skimming snowflakes from his sneakers as he strode through puddles.

For today, he decided to be a kid who went ice-skating.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter title is from "I'm Only Happy When It Rains" by Garbage, but might as well have been based on "We Don't Talk About Bruno" because that is my internal soundtrack for the rest of the month. God I want the free brain space to write a "We Don't Talk About Touya" version.

this chapter brought to you by: my headcanon that Shouto is a youngest sibling with no real taste for music of his own, so he "borrowed" from his siblings. This is how I ended up with most of my music as a kid, anyway. No idea when this show is based, so kid!Shouto gets a walkman and, anachronistic or not, kid!Touya's favorite song is now DaLaBengBa. Y'welcome.

Because this headcanon has been percolating for literal months now, you can find Shouto's eclectic playlist here.

you should see my favorite people, you'll get a glimpse of gold through their skin

Chapter Notes

> *walks in ten months late with a chai latte and a chapter* THE BOYOS MEET A NEW FRIEND

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Oh my god I'm dumb," Hitoshi realized quietly, arms wrapped ineffectually around himself. "I'm so dumb, wow."

Izuku gave him a quizzical look from where he was sat, lacing up his skates.

Good that you're finally admitting it, but why now? Kouji replied, standing cozy with his skates laced and his back to the mostly-empty rink.

"It's summer," Hitoshi continued. "And we're dressed for summer and I thought it would be fine because you know, ice-skating, it's like having iced tea, nice and refreshing, I figured it would just be a nice change from the humidity. But no! I was wrong!"

Izuku's head tilted further, regarding the way Hitoshi chafed his hands up and down his own arms through his thin jacket.

"A-are you c-cold?" He asked, scooching closer to lean gently against Hitoshi's shoulder.

"I'm fr-eezing," Hitoshi corrected, voice breaking slightly as his teeth began chattering. "I ca-n't. Go on wi-thout m-e."

Or, Kouji suggested, *we could go to the counter and buy you a hat and gloves.*

"A-nd a sn-ow ja-cket?" Hitoshi asked. "We ju-st got our sk-ates on..."

"Th-they sell hot cocoa t-too, Hicchan," Izuku pointed out. "A-and we'll be warmer o-once we start moving."

Hitoshi shivered hard and grimaced. "Cu-rse you and yo-ur logic," he grumped. "Fine, let's get wa-rm."

Wobbling slightly, the procession of three penguin-shuffled over to the front counter, where Hitoshi was gratified to find a plain black beanie he could pull to cover his ears completely, and a mediocre pair of wool gloves.

"Y-ou guys su-re you do-n't want a pair?" He asked, wincing and rubbing at his jaw to try to stop his teeth chattering.

In answer, Kouji laid his hand on the back of Hitoshi's neck, practically radiating heat. Hitoshi retaliated by wrapping his bare hand around Kouji's wrist, prompting a high shriek from the other boy.

Have you been holding ice cubes?! Kouji asked. *You're freezing!*

Izuku curiously reached out to touch Hitoshi's hand and recoiled sharply. "Your c-circulation is *bad*," he informed Hitoshi.

"Tha-nk you, it's a ta-lent," Hitoshi said sarcastically. Be-hatted, be-gloved and thoroughly bemused, he led them all to the rink entrance. "Now, let me ju-st..." He stepped carefully onto the ice, practically plastering himself to the low wall. "… push off..." Very gingerly, he slid forward, right foot first. When it came time to move his left forward, he teetered sharply but recovered, supporting himself with one hand on the banister.

Kouji, who regularly went rollerblading with his parents, managed to get a good rhythm going, staying to Hitoshi's left without crowding him.

"Wait up for--" Izuku stepped onto the ice and immediately wiped out, landing squarely on his butt. "...ow?" He sat there blinking with surprise.

Chuckling so hard he nearly fell in turn, Kouji circled back to help Izuku to his feet. Once the smaller boy was standing steadily, Kouji demonstrated the basic skating motion for him. *Go slowly*, he advised, *and don't stare at your feet.*

Thanks!, Izuku signed. Blowing out a determined breath, he slowly began to skate, pushing forward foot by foot. Even with the chill rising from his feet, he very quickly found himself warming up.

Seeing that Izuku had somewhat gotten the hang of it, Kouji skated back to Hitoshi's side, giggling slightly at seeing how closely his friend was hugging the banister.

Slowly, stumbling, they rounded their first lap around the rink, steadily gaining confidence in stride. The chill rising from the ice began to feel refreshing against their faces, cheeks rosy with exertion.

They made a game out of setting their feet in time with the pop music coming from the rink speakers, wobbling slightly whenever they had to round a corner. The rink was mostly empty, except for a few young couples, a kid their age with distinctive hair, and a small class of young kids in the center of the rink.

Game to try a new challenge, Izuku watched a few minutes of the children's class and began to mimic them, skating in reverse.

"I-I-I think I'm getting it!" he chirped, arms waving a bit wildly. "It's n-not as h-hard as it looks--" He clipped a little too close to the other lone skater, mid-gesture.

"Watch out!" Hitoshi warned, just as Izuku turned to avoid the kid and accidentally clocked him in the face with his elbow.

"Ah!" Kouji exclaimed, just as "Shit!" Hitoshi cried.

Izuku turned to the other boy, now flat on his back on the ice with an icy hand pressed against his reddening nose.

Caught miserably between shouting "I'm sorry!" and "Is your face okay?", Izuku shouted, "I-I'M SORRY YOUR FACE IS OKAY!!"

Silence… fell… across the rink.

"I m-m-mean, I'm glad your face is-- is your face o-- I'm sorry I--" Izuku flushed red as a strawberry and carefully crouched next to the boy with candy-cane red and white hair. "I'm s-so sorry," he whispered,

mortified.

His friends, helpfully, chose this moment to break out in helpless cackles.

Oh dear, Kouji signed, one hand smothering his glee. Hitoshi, on the other hand, was laughing so hard he almost strained a muscle.

"Izuku, this is the --ha-- third-- hahaha ohmygod-- this is the THIRD time you've accidentally hit someone in the face!" he crowed.

Izuku ignored both of them completely, reaching a hand to help the other boy up. "A-are you okay? Do you n-need to, um, to s-sit down? I can get you a h-hot cocoa, if that would--"

The boy looked up at him, one hand still pressed against the red mark at the bridge of his nose. Utterly blank-faced, he nodded. "Hot cocoa is good."

Chapter End Notes

> This was such a struggle to get down-- the last few chapters of a story always are. I hope this chapter turned out alright, my entire outline for it was:
>
> Shouto: my level of social awareness is very low. I wouldn't know friendship if it was very short and punched me in the face.
> Izuku: *half-way across the city* *twitch*
> Izuku: *still half-way across the city* I GOTTA GO DO A THING RIGHT THIS MOMENT IMMEDIATELY
> Izuku: (ง'-')ง
>
> (Also, if there's any confusion about Izuku's face-hitting track record, he has accidentally hit *and* headbutted another kid at Aikido in chapter 6).

Shenanigans

Chapter Summary

> When he was four years old, Izuku was the kind of kid that packed his pockets with band-aids and handkerchiefs, ready at a moment's notice to drag a friend to wash off their scrapes and deliver them to their mothers for a healing kiss.
>
> He still went almost nowhere without a clean handkerchief and an abbreviated first aid kit—band-aids, a roll of elastic bandages for sprains, a small bottle of Tylenol, a pack of tissues, and a chocolate bar (for low blood sugar).

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When he was four years old, Izuku was the kind of kid that packed his pockets with band-aids and handkerchiefs, ready at a moment's notice to drag a friend to wash off their scrapes and deliver them to their mothers for a healing kiss.

He still went almost nowhere without a clean handkerchief and an abbreviated first aid kit—band-aids, a roll of elastic bandages for sprains, a small bottle of Tylenol, a pack of tissues, and a chocolate bar (for low blood sugar).

The boy he'd accidentally elbowed in the face seemed pretty prepared as well, what with his ice powers. Izuku held back questions by physically biting his lip, rummaging in his fanny pack to offer him a soft handkerchief.

"I-It's not good to put ice directly on your sk-skin," he murmured. "Y-you can get fr-fr-frostbite."

He looked up sharply, giving in to curiosity. "U-unless you have a re-

resistance to ice? As well as cr-creating it, I m-mean."

The other boy leveled him a blank look, accepting the handkerchief. "No."

"U-um." No to what? The resistance to ice? That was surprising—elemental powers usually granted the user a modicum of protection from their own element, take for example Endeavor who could produce fire on top of his own skin and not get burned. And Kacchan, who could spark explosions from his palms without getting worse than a mild sting if he overdid it. Izuku placed his hand on his chin, contemplating. He barely noticed his lips moving to his thoughts.

"Don't compare me to Endeavor," the ice boy ordered, staring at him flatly.

"O-oh, I would never," Izuku said hurriedly.

"Yeah, that guy's a certified ass," Hitoshi added.

He's not on the Shit List, Kouji confessed. *But only because I don't know where to find him.*

Izuku and the boy both stared at Kouji in confusion. Izuku, because he'd never heard of Kouji's shit list. Shit List? The emphasis made it seem like it was in capitals.

The ice boy, presumably, because he couldn't read sign.

Hitoshi put his forehead in his hands. "Kouji, the pact was to never tell anyone about the Shit List."

"Wh-what--" Izuku paused, contemplating the swear word. Then, visibly deciding not to say it, he finished. "What is th-that list?"

"I would also like to know how it relates to Endeavor," the boy added, shifting his icepack down slightly so he could narrow both eyes at Kouji and Hitoshi.

Hitoshi and Kouji exchanged a long, speaking look. Then they both sighed.

"Okay, the first thing you need to know is that we were very careful not to interfere with heroes' lives while on the job," Hitoshi said. "As a preface, we only started the Shit List because of an incident where Izuku nearly died."

Ice boy looked between the three blankly.

Anticipating his question, Izuku raised a timid hand. "I'm I-Izuku. And this is Hitoshi," he gestured to his friend, "and Kouji." He finished with awkward finger guns, at a loss for how to continue.

"Shouto," said Shouto.

"Charmed," Hitoshi responded. "And if you really want to know about the Shit List, please be aware that it's not really all that illegal and also even if it counted as vandalism, it would be almost impossible to prove.

"Like, what are the police going to do?" Hitoshi continued. "Go up to some birds and ask, 'Yes, and you say the defendant ordered you to defecate on the personal property of these three heroes? What? He simply asked nicely? You were happy to assist?'"

You've skipped a few steps, Kouji interjected.

"So, long story short, after an …interlude with Izuku, we found the need to take revenge on a few heroes. Kouji here," Kouji waved in demonstration, "makes friends with local birds. Local birds are happy to assist him when he says, 'Hey, this person deserves to have bird poop on everything they love.'"

Izuku meeped. "You… y-you two… that's i-ill-ille-- that's *d-dangerous*."

"Also virtually untraceable, unless you have Kouji's exact quirk," Hitoshi answered calmly.

Shouto sat in contemplative silence, watching as Izuku curled in on himself in worry and was slowly soothed back upright.

Finally, he spoke, avoiding eye contact. "Endeavor travels to different provinces frequently, but he's most often located in Shizuoka City."

It was clear that this was a request masquerading as an objective statement.

Hitoshi cheered. "Glad to have you as an accomplice!"

"N-now there's three of them," Izuku muttered.

Chapter End Notes

Return of the shit list! Man I did so much research for this chapter trying to find out if I should have Hitoshi say like "it's only a misdemeanor if we're caught" but apparently in Japan it is SUPER illegal to vandalize and you can get jail time. So the chapter reached its current form.

Partially inspired by my dad's old shirt that said "I didn't do it. And besides, everybody else was doing it- and it shouldn't be forbidden anyway." He wore it to airports.

Side note, while trying to figure out where the Todorokis lived, I found out that a lot of the place names in BNHA (Musutafa, Arudera, Kamino, Nabu Island, etc.) are inspired by planet names in Star Wars. Who knew!

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